



PRESIDENT BENEŠ

In the study of his war-time home at Aston Abbots,
Buckinghamshire.
Colour photograph by P. G. Hennell.

DR BENEŠ

by

COMPTON MACKENZIE

WITH
15 PLATES IN COLOUR
66 BLACK & WHITE
ILLUSTRATIONS IN
PHOTOGRAVURE



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS book was inspired by many long talks I enjoyed with Dr Beneš during the spring and early summer of 1944, and it was written immediately afterwards. Two years later I have tried to change what was then the future into the present and what was then the present into the past. Nevertheless, here and there the spirit of 1944 remains apparent, and no amount of juggling with verbs can hide it. As a tribute to the spirit of Dr Beneš, it is worth setting on record that not one sentence has had to be deleted because it had been proved false or absurd by subsequent events.

I wish to put on record the invaluable help given to me by Mr Josef Loewenbach, of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the collection of relevant material, and for the care with which he has read the proofs. This formal acknowledgment is an inadequate expression of my gratitude. Without Mr Loewenbach's devoted work I should have found the task of writing this book in the middle of war-time impossible.

C. M.

August 1946

TO MY FRIEND
EPAMINONDAS H. ATHANASSOGLOU
AS AN EXPRESSION OF OUR FAITH
IN THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PLATES IN COLOUR

	PAGE
PRESIDENT BENEŠ	
Colour photograph by P. G. Hennell	<i>Frontispiece</i>
JAN MASARYK	15
Colour photograph by P. G. Hennell	
THE PRESIDENT AND MME BENEŠ	16
Colour photograph by P. G. Hennell	
ENTOMBMENT	64
Panel from the Altar-piece by the Master of Třeboň (second half of the fourteenth century)	
MADONNA AND CHILD, SURROUNDED BY THE JOYS OF MARY	65
Unknown Czech master (early fifteenth century)	
A STREET IN OLD PRAGUE	80
Oil painting by Jan Mínařík (1862-1937)	
BOHEMIAN LANDSCAPE	81
Oil painting by Antonín Slavíček (1870-1910)	
VASE WITH FLOWERS	144
Oil painting by Václav Špála (1885-1946)	
FISHING HARBOUR IN BRITTANY	145
Tempera by Jan Zrzavý (b. 1890)	
BOHEMIAN LANDSCAPE	160
Water-colour by Václav Špála (1885-1946)	
GARDEN	161
Oil painting by Otakar Coubine (b. 1883)	
THE CZECH WAR EFFORT IN BRITAIN	272
Colour photograph by P. G. Hennell	
A CZECH WAR-WORKER IN BRITAIN	273
Colour photograph by P. G. Hennell	
CZECH COASTAL COMMAND CREW 'AT THE READY'	288
Colour photograph by P. G. Hennell	
THE PRESIDENT'S FIRST PUBLIC SPEECH AFTER HIS RETURN	298
Colour photograph from the official Czech colour film <i>Return to Prague</i>	

LIST OF BLACK-AND-WHITE ILLUSTRATIONS

	FOLLOWING PAGE
THE COTTAGE WHERE THE PRESIDENT WAS BORN	32
MATĚJ BENEŠ	32
ANNA BENEŠOVÁ	32
THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN KOŽLANY	32
THE COLLEGE IN VINOHRADY, PRAGUE	32
EDVARD BENEŠ AT COLLEGE	32
EDVARD BENEŠ, 1905	32
HANNA VLČKOVÁ	32
LIBRARY HALL AT THE CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE	32
<hr/>	
NEAT LITTLE TOWNS DOT THE COUNTRYSIDE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA	112
ZLIN, IN NORTHERN MORAVIA	112
ČESKÉ BUDĚJOVICE, IN SOUTH BOHEMIA	112
THE CHURCH AT ZVOLEŇ, SLOVAKIA	112
PRAGUE: VIEW FROM THE ARCHES OF THE ST VITUS DOME	112
PRAGUE: CITY OF A HUNDRED SPIRES	112
PRAGUE: VIEW ACROSS OLD ROOFS	112
PRAGUE: BRIDGES ACROSS THE RIVER VLTAVA	112
PRAGUE: ST WENCESLAS SQUARE, THE CAPITAL'S MAIN STREET	112
PRAGUE: MEDIEVAL TOWERS	112
PRAGUE: HRADČANY CASTLE	112

PRESIDENT T. G. MASARYK	FOLLOWING PAGE 192
GENERAL M. R. ŠTEFÁNIK	192
DR. E. BENEŠ, 1914	192
DR. E. BENEŠ: FOREIGN MINISTER, AGED 34	192
VERSAILLES, 1919	192
GENEVA, 1920	192
GENEVA, 1926	192
THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE AT GENEVA	192
THREE STATESMEN	192
THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF THE LITTLE ENTENTE	192
MOSCOW, 1935	192
PRAGUE, 1935	192
MASTER AND DISCIPLE	192

PRESIDENT MASARYK AND DR BENEŠ	224
IN SEZIMOVO ÚSTÍ, SOUTH BOHEMIA	224
DR BENEŠ AT SEZIMOVO ÚSTÍ, IN 1933	224
MME AND DR BENEŠ	224
RECREATION	224
BY THE RIVER LUŽNICE	224
THE PRESIDENT ARGUES	224
THE CZERNIN PALACE IN PRAGUE	224
THE CZERNIN PALACE: GARDEN FRONT	224

SEPTEMBER 1938	FOLLOWING PAGE 304
THE OCCUPATION IN MARCH 1939	304
IN THE CENTRE OF THE CAPITAL	304
THE GERMANS TAKE OVER	304
DR EMIL HÁCHA	304
DR BENEŠ AND BRITAIN'S AMBASSADOR	304
WASHINGTON, 1943	304
TWO PRESIDENTS	304
A FESTIVE RECEPTION AT THE TOWN HALL IN NEW YORK	304
THE CZECHOSLOVAK ARMY IN BRITAIN	304
NEW YORK, MAY 1943	304
<hr/>	
THE LAST DAYS OF THE PROTECTORATE	336
A CZECHOSLOVAK PARTISAN	336
PRAGUE AT WAR	336
LIBERATION	336
THE PRESIDENT RETURNS	336
THE TRIUMPHANT JOURNEY	336
CHEERING CROWDS LINE THE STREETS	336
MORE CHEERS	336
ZDENĚK FIERLINGER, PRIME MINISTER OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA	336
GENERAL SVOBODA AND GENERAL BOČEK	336
BACK AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE	336

PROLOGUE

IT is seven o'clock on the evening of September 12th, 1938. Hitler is due to erupt on the platform at Nuremberg for the annual corroboree of the National Socialist Party. In Britain we are in a true blue funk, because it looks as if what we had too long supposed to be a mere freak really does intend to precipitate the world into war and that our undignified appeasement has been in vain. I switch on the wireless; I switch from Nuremberg to Cologne, from Cologne to Leipzig, from Leipzig to Berlin, from Berlin to Stuttgart, from Stuttgart to Breslau, from Breslau to Munich, from Munich to Hamburg, from Hamburg all the length of the Third Reich to Vienna. The result is the same everywhere: nothing but a curiously ragged performance of the Overture to *The Mastersingers*, which is considered the fitting prelude to what may be a declaration of European chaos. The miserable performance goes on for a quarter of an hour, ground out, it seems, by a small-town orchestra out of time and out of tune. After fifteen minutes the music stops. From the loud-speaker come such bangs and bellows and maniac howls as from 'Pandemonium, the high Capital of Satan and his Peers.' "Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!" The medicine-man has appeared: the braves have begun their war-dance. The barbaric clamour continues for a while, and then silence is arranged for the medicine-man to pronounce his incantation. It is the same old dreary tirade against the Dictate of Versailles, the same old dreary ranting against the democracies, the same old dreary verbal buttering of the nation which has given up butter for guns. I switch off from Munich, which, ominously enough did I but know it, is giving the best reception of the Nuremberg Walpurgisnacht, and tune in to a B.B.C. talk. I find that the subject is the "Birth of a Hurricane," and, deciding that if a hurricane is being born to-night I will not listen in to the accouchement, I switch back to Hitler; but my German loses itself in that diarrhoea of words. I tune in to the Promenade Concert at Queen's Hall. The Venusberg music! I look at the programme. The *Siegfried Idyll*? The *Siegfried Idyll* does not sound idyllic when I remember the Siegfried Line. *Wotan's Farewell*? But Wotan and Thor and Odin seem on the point of greeting once again a most reluctant world. It is Monday night, and so there will be nothing but Wagner at Queen's Hall. I switch back to Germany.

"This misery of the Sudeten Germans is indescribable. [*Horried groans from the wolf-pack.*] It is sought to annihilate them. As human beings they are oppressed and scandalously treated in an intolerable fashion. When three and a half million members of a people which numbers nearly eighty millions may not sing a song they like simply because it does not please the Czechs [*moans*] or when they are beaten until the blood flows solely because they wear stockings the sight of which offends the Czechs [*yowls*] or when they are terrorized and ill-treated because they use a form of greeting which the Czechs dislike [*imprecations*] or when they are hunted and harried like helpless wild-fowl for every expression of their national sentiment . . ."

On it goes, and on and on, this turbid spate above which at intervals rise those animal snarls and growls and hideous ululations.

"The Sudeten Germans were to be shown the brutality of Czech violence so as to warn them from championing their national interests and voting in their support. In order, however, to give plausibility to this demonstration in the eyes of the world the Czech Government, Herr Beneš . . ."

"*Bluthund! Bluthund!* Bloodhound! Bloodhound!" the maddened Nazi braves yell.

"Herr Beneš . . ."

No toad spat with such venom as Hitler spits out that name.

"Herr Beneš invented the lie that Germany had mobilized her troops and was on the point of marching into Czechoslovakia."

I switch off. After the tone of essential hate in which that last sentence has been delivered the soapbox frothing is tame.

A fortnight later in Berlin, on the eve of Munich, Hitler mouthed a speech in the Sportpalast which was practically one long personal attack on the President of the country whose murder he was planning.

"The question which in these last months and weeks has moved us so profoundly has long been familiar to us: it is not so much Czechoslovakia: it is rather Herr Beneš. In this name is concentrated all that which to-day moves millions, which causes them to despair or fills them with a fanatical resolution. . . . The Czech State began with a single lie, and the father of this lie was named Beneš. This Herr Beneš at that time appeared in Versailles, and he first of all gave the assurance that there was a Czechoslovak nation. And the Anglo-Saxon statesmen, who were, as always, not very adequately versed in respect of questions of geography or nationality, did not at that time find it necessary to test these assertions of Herr Beneš. . . ."

"At the time that Herr Beneš lied this State into being he gave a solemn pledge. We all know how Herr Beneš has redeemed his pledge. . . . He began his reign of terror. . . . And now England and France have sent to Czechoslovakia the only possible demand—to set free the Germans and to surrender their area to the Reich.

"I have demanded that now after twenty years Herr Beneš should at last be compelled to come to terms with the truth. On October 1st he will have to hand over to us this area.

"Herr Beneš now places his hopes on the world! And he and his diplomats make no secret of the fact. They state: it is our hope that Chamberlain will be overthrown, that Daladier will be removed, that on every hand resolutions are on the way. They place their hope on Soviet Russia.

"And then I can say only one thing: now two men stand arrayed one against the other: there is Herr Beneš, and here stand I. We are two men of a different make-up. In the great struggle of the peoples while Herr Beneš was sneaking about through the world, I as a decent German soldier did my duty. And now to-day I stand over against this man as the soldier of my people! . . . With regard to the problem of the Sudeten Germans my patience is now at an end! I have made Herr Beneš an offer which is nothing but the carrying into effect of what he himself has promised. The decision now lies in his hands: peace or war! He will either accept this offer and now at last give to the Germans their freedom, or we will go and fetch this freedom for ourselves. The world must take note that in four and a half years of war and through the long years of my political life there is one thing which no one could ever cast in my teeth: I have never been a coward!

"Now I go before my people as its first soldier, and behind me—that the world should know—there marches a people—and a different people from that of 1918!

"If at that time a wandering scholar¹ was able to inject into our people the poison of democratic catchwords the people of to-day is no longer the people that it was then. Such catchwords are for us like wasp-stings: they cannot hurt us: we are now immune.

"In this hour the whole German people will unite with me! It will feel my will to be its will. Just as in my eyes it is its future and its fate which give me the commission for my action.

"And we wish now to make our will as strong as it was in the time of our fight, the time when I, as a simple soldier, went forth to conquer a Reich and never doubted of success and final victory.

¹ Woodrow Wilson.

"Then there gathered close about me a band of brave men and brave women, and they went with me. And so I ask you, my German people, to take your stand behind me, man by man, and woman by woman.

"In this hour we all wish to form a common will, and that will must be stronger than every hardship and every danger.

"And if this will is stronger than hardship and danger then one day it will break down hardship and danger.

"We are determined!

"Now let Herr Beneš make his choice!"

On the evening of September 26th, 1938, I heard the poison of that challenge foam from the lips of that vile paranoiac; and when on the morrow I read his words in print I made up my mind that one day I would learn something of the man who could rouse that thing of evil to such a hydrophobic frenzy of personal hate.

Nearly six years were to pass before I had an opportunity to ask Dr Beneš what his opinion was of Hitler as a human being. He leaned back in his chair and cocked his head on one side, while his bright eyes seemed to contemplate the question as a thrush contemplates the end of an earthworm wriggling upon a lawn. Then he began to swing his spectacles backward and forward pensively until suddenly he shot forward.

"Hitler is a vulgar man. Completely vulgar. He is like an illiterate. No reason. No ability to reason."

He thrust out the four fingers of his left hand and jiggled the first and second finger of his right hand just in front of them. "He can only feel like this."

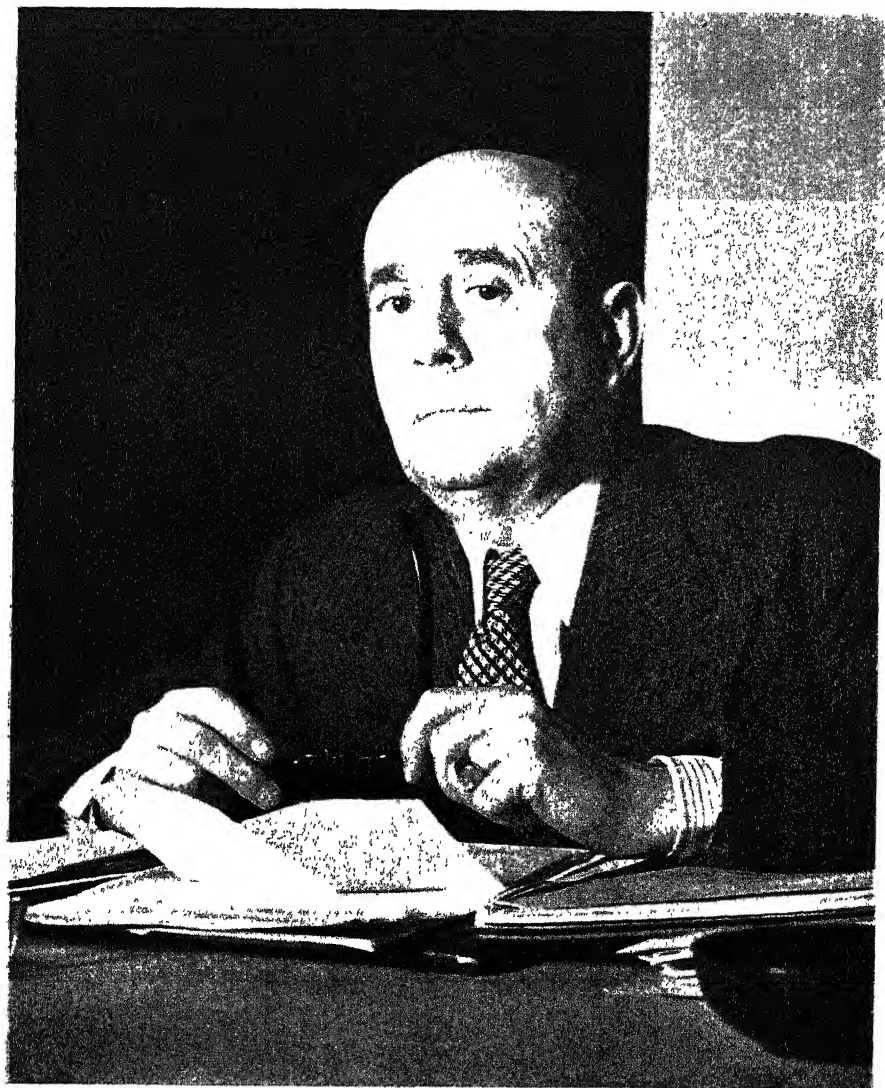
I realized that the four fingers represented Hitler and that the two fingers were acting as antennæ to represent his approach to a moral or intellectual judgment.

Dr Beneš sat back in his chair again. Those bright eyes were twinkling with a memory that evidently gave him a good deal of pleasure.

"I would never meet him," he said with a smile, and then with a gesture of apology for the flesh's weakness he went on, "I really could not discuss anything with a man like that who is animalesque. Is that a good word in English?"

"It doesn't actually exist," I replied, "but it is such a good word for Hitler that I shall do my best to get it into the language."

"Yes, animalesque," Dr Beneš continued meditatively; "one could



JAN MASARYK

Czechoslovakia's Minister to the Court of St James's for fourteen years between the two World Wars. As Czech Foreign Minister in London during the Second World War he contributed a great deal to Dr Beneš's political and diplomatic victory in alliance with the United Nations.

Colour photograph by P. G. Hennell.



THE PRESIDENT AND MME BENES

In their English home.

Colour photograph by P. G. Hennell.

not have a useful meeting with an animalesque like Hitler. But he was furious that I would not go to see him. Very furious. He sent through friends of Henlein. . . .”

“The Sudeten Führer?”

“Yes—another vulgar man. I said, ‘No.’ Then later he sent again through another friend of Henlein for me to come to Berchtesgaden. And again I said ‘No.’ He was more furious. And then for a third time he tried to send for me to come. By now you will understand he was already threatening Czechoslovakia, and he was so furious that my friends became a little nervous in case it might be better if I were to go and see him. So I said, ‘Very well, I will go, but in this pocket’ ”—he tapped his right side sharply—“ ‘I will put a revolver, and in this pocket’ ”—he tapped his left side even more sharply—“ ‘I will put a hand-grenade, and if he shouts at me as he has shouted at Schuschnigg I shall throw the grenade, and there will be a European scandal. Do you want me to go?’ ”

“But would you really have blown him up?” I asked.

“Well, I was asking myself what was the use of meeting such a man. I like to meet people who are capable of discussion. I know how he had treated even British statesmen who went to see him. I really felt mortified to think of such men exposing themselves to the ravings of a maniac. I felt it was undignified of them to put themselves in such a position. I knew that so far as I was concerned a mutual exchange of ideas was out of the question. His plans for the future of Czechoslovakia ruled out discussion in advance. I am considered in Central Europe almost a human symbol of that democracy which Hitler loathes. He and I were living in two different worlds. There could be no mental link between us. Very well, he would have begun to shout at me, and so offend me. He would have been boastful and disgusting. I would not have tolerated that. Therefore my conclusion was: if I went it would end in disaster because I should never accept his insults. I should have to answer him, and as such a creature is impervious to reason the only answer would be to take a hand-grenade in my pocket and when he started to shout simply to throw it at him.”

It was clear as Dr Beneš’s own crystal-clear eyes when he said this that he certainly would have done just that.

We cannot regret that Dr Beneš never went to Berchtesgaden, because though such a visit might have destroyed Hitler it would also have destroyed Dr Beneš himself without securing the world against the will to war of the German people. Yet one cannot help speculating upon so fantastic a might-have-been.

Would that animalesque instinct have warned Hitler what was in store for him if he had tried to bully the President of Czechoslovakia? Perhaps it would, as it warned him to throw himself down on his face in the road when the Government troops opened fire in the Munich Putsch, and has made it necessary for him ever since to protest he was never a coward. Let us leave the question, which is unanswerable. Dr Beneš refused for the third time, and the animalesque man's baffled rage was expressed in those two September speeches. Between them there was published in the *Daily Mail* an interview which Mr G. Ward Price had with Hitler on September 17th, from which a few excerpts can usefully be quoted in this prologue without stopping at present to rebut the preposterous falsifications of historical fact.

"Herr Gott," exclaimed the Führer, raising his voice to an indignant shout, "what couldn't I do in Germany and for Germany if it were not for this infernal Czech tyranny over a few million Germans? But it must stop. It *shall* stop! . . .

"The Czechs had never been an independent people until the peace treaties raised them to an undeserved and artificial mastery over minorities more numerous than themselves. In the Middle Ages they had been a German principality. Two hundred years before Queen Elizabeth there had been a German university in Prague.

"Modern German had been created by the diplomatic language used in the German Emperor's government offices in that city, which he made for a time his capital.

"Once, indeed, during the Hussite wars, the Czechs had gained a temporary independence. They used it like the Bolsheviks, burning and ravaging, until the Germans rose and crushed them.

"The creation of this heterogeneous Czechoslovak Republic after the war was lunacy. It has none of the characteristics of a nation, whether from the standpoint of ethnology, strategy, economics, or language.

"To set an intellectually inferior handful of Czechs to rule over minorities belonging to races like the Germans, Poles, Hungarians, with a thousand years of culture behind them, was a work of folly and ignorance. The Sudeten Germans have no respect for the Czechs and will never accept their rule. After the war the Allied Powers declared that Germany was unworthy to govern blacks, yet at the same time they set second-rate people like the Czechs in authority over three and a half million Germans of the highest character and culture . . .

"If Henlein is arrested I myself shall become the Leader of the Sudeten Germans, and I should be glad to see how long after that

Dr Beneš would be able to issue his decrees. I hope he won't issue a warrant for my arrest!

"If the Czechs had possessed a great statesman he would long ago have let the Sudeten Germans join the Reich, and been content thereby to ensure that continuance of autonomy for the Czechs themselves. But Dr Beneš is a politician, not a statesman."

He and I were living in two different worlds.

True indeed—and yet the two men were born at places near enough to each other. From Braunau, on the Austro-Bavarian border, to Kožlany, the large Bohemian village between Plzeň (Pilsen) and Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad), is hardly a hundred and twenty miles as the crow flies.

CHAPTER I

DURING the last quarter of a century an incessant propaganda has been maintained by interested parties that the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic was the major blunder of the many blunders made at Versailles.

People had accepted as a natural agglomeration of races the Holy Roman Empire, so called, as Voltaire said, because it was neither holy, Roman, nor an Empire. When in due course the elected Holy Roman Emperor dissolved into the hereditary Habsburg Emperor of Austria people did not find anything unnatural in such a State. When Bismarck offered such unexpectedly generous terms to Austria after the brief, inglorious war of 1866 it was not appreciated how secure he felt that Vienna was henceforth at the mercy of Berlin, and that not only could he achieve the unification of Germany without interference from Austria, but that whenever the moment was suitable such a unified Germany could confidently expect to incorporate the Austrian Empire in support of the *Drang nach Osten*. When in 1867 Austria and Hungary reached their arrangement it was not considered unnatural that the Iron Crown of St Stephen should compress within its domination millions of Slovaks, Rumanians, and Yugoslavs. It was only when out of the collapse of the Austrian Empire a new and smaller agglomeration was rescued to be a matrix of Central European democracy that the woes of the reactionary Magyars became as romantic a feature of the British Press as the twaddle about old Vienna became a romantic feature of the theatre, the film, and the fancy-dress novel. That Austria under the rule of that death's head of an emperor, with the eager support of the Magyars, should have aimed to bring Serbia under the same agglomeration as Croatia and Slovenia and have paid the penalty was forgotten. That Germany should have associated herself with this plan to cripple still further the Slavonic races with a view to grabbing the riches of the Ukraine and driving eastward, and finally have paid the penalty for four years of ruthless warfare, was forgotten. When Hitler ranted about the miseries of three and a half millions of Germans who belonged to Germany it was overlooked that not one of them had ever belonged to Germany, and that in demanding them for the Third Reich he was in effect demanding that Germany should be rewarded for losing a great war of deliberate aggression. When Lloyd George's

book *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*¹ was published just after Munich it was comforting for recreant opinion to read that Beneš presented his case "with great skill and craft. He either ignored or minimized the fact that he was claiming the incorporation in the Czechoslovak Republic of races which, on the principle of self-determination, would have elected to join other States. He was full of professions of moderation, modesty, and restraint in the demands he put forward for the new Republic. He larded his speech throughout with phrases thatreeked with professions of sympathy for the exalted ideals proclaimed by the Allies and America in their crusade for international right. Altogether it was a great misfortune that Czechoslovakia was represented at the Peace Conference not by her wise leader, President Masaryk, but by an impulsive, clever, but much less sagacious and more short-sighted politician who did not foresee that the more he grasped, the less he could retain."

After his treatment of Ireland this tenderness of Lloyd George to the principle of self-determination is touched with unreality. Against Lloyd George's estimate of Dr Beneš can be cited Robert Lansing, the American Secretary of State, who expressed special appreciation of "the calm, moderate and conciliatory attitude" of Dr Beneš and the Czechoslovak Delegation; Lord Robert Cecil, who said the Czechoslovak Delegation's great success at the Peace Conference was due to their never demanding and never insisting upon what it was impossible to give them; and even Clemenceau, who wrote of the universal respect and confidence the attitude of the Czechoslovak Delegation won by its candour of speech. Perhaps it was natural for Lloyd George to suppose that if his advice had been taken at the Peace Conference another world war would have been avoided: but the minor 'injustices' of Versailles were not what stirred the Germans up to launch a Second World War: it was the major 'injustice' of having been beaten in the first one.

And now for a cursory glance at the past of this unnatural Versailles reaction which offended Lloyd George's nice sense of proportion and Adolf Hitler's profound knowledge of history.

The Slav tribes of Czechs, Moravians, and Slovaks probably settled themselves in the heart of Europe about the time that the Western half of the Roman Empire collapsed into ruin, and from the time of their arrival they were engaged in stemming the advance of Germanic tribes in a contrary direction. In the ninth century German missionaries had no success in Christianizing the inhabitants of what was called,

¹ Gollancz, 1938.

somewhat hyperbolically, the Great Moravian Empire, and this seems to have been due to the natural antipathy between the two races which has endured for fifteen hundred years. Rostislav, the ruler of the Moravian Empire, was nevertheless convinced that Christianity was required and asked the Byzantine Emperor to send missionaries acquainted with the Slav language. Two brothers, Cyril and Methodius, natives of Thessalonica, were despatched in 863 and, with the approval and encouragement of Pope John VIII, succeeded in establishing Christianity and with it a Slav liturgy. Later Pope Stephen V revoked the permission to use a Slav liturgy, and Latin was reimposed. One can argue on reasonable grounds that when the Great Schism came the Bohemians, Moravians, and Slovaks would have been an advanced bastion of the Orthodox Church if the Papacy had not anticipated the disruptive Byzantine influence by insisting on the Latin liturgy. It would be ignoring other vital factors to claim that the inclination of the Czechs to Protestantism in the years to come was entirely due to a sense of frustrated nationality in finding themselves committed to the Latin Church; but it did play a part in nourishing a disposition to assert nationality against the authority of Rome when that authority was expressed materially by Germanic princes.

The ecclesiastical struggle in Moravia was suddenly overshadowed by the last great irruption into Europe from the East in the shape of the Magyars, of the same race as the Turks, the Finns, and the Huns. The Germans encouraged them to conquer Moravia, and then, fearful of the power they had let loose in Europe, tried to help the Slavs to stem the tide. Germans and Slavs were utterly defeated at Bratislava (Pressburg), and the Magyars established themselves as a continuously disruptive and acquisitive force in Central Europe comparable to the Prussians in the north and the Bulgars in the south-east of Europe. The immediate result was to cut off Slovakia from the Czechs and hold it as a portion of the Hungarian Kingdom until the Treaty of Versailles. For over a thousand years the Slovaks were to occupy a position under their Magyar masters not unlike that of the Spartan Helots. With the break-up of the Moravian Empire, Bohemia gradually established itself under the Přemyslide dynasty and with Moravia enjoyed almost exactly the boundaries granted by the Treaty of Versailles to the western half of Czechoslovakia.

That the Princes of medieval Bohemia supplied one of the seven Electors of the Holy Roman Empire is true, but that does not mean it is therefore now an integral part of the Third Reich. Such a claim is based entirely on the pseudo-ethnology fashionable for many years

in Germany and has no support whatever from the juridical theory of the Holy Roman Empire. Barbarossa, who was an early example of the aggressive Germanizer, tried to break up the Czech State by creating Moravia a Margravate directly dependent upon the Emperor, but five years later the new Margrave acknowledged the suzerainty of the Duke of Bohemia. Then Barbarossa created the Bishop of Prague a Prince of the Empire and thereby made him independent in lay matters of the Czech Duke. Nevertheless, the next Bishop, in 1197, did homage to the Duke. Finally in 1212 Frederick II, Stupor Mundi, that greatest of all Hohenstaufens, that man born before his time, that portent of a potential German civilization which was not repeated until Goethe, by the Golden Sicilian Bull raised Bohemia to a kingdom and explicitly guaranteed the rights of that kingdom in perpetuity. It is not suggested that the Czechoslovak Republic should appeal to the Bull of a Holy Roman Emperor in the thirteenth century for its juridical basis as a European State to-day; but since Hitler called history as his witness let history testify against him.

In that interview with Mr Ward Price on September 17th, 1938, Hitler claimed that the Czechs had been a German principality during the Middle Ages, and declared, presumably as a proof of this, that two hundred years before Queen Elizabeth there had been a German university in Prague.

In 1311 John, son of Henry of Luxemburg, King of the Romans, and Elizabeth, the youngest sister of Wenceslas III, the last Přemyslide king, was crowned King of Bohemia. John was that blind King of Bohemia who fell at Crécy and whose three ostrich plumes and motto were taken by the Black Prince. From that battle his son Charles escaped to succeed as King of the Romans and King of Bohemia. He was a remarkable young man with a wide international outlook, who spoke Latin, French, Italian, German, and Czech with equal accomplishment. He was elected Holy Roman Emperor. Within less than two years of his accession to the Bohemian throne he had secured from the Pope a Bull of foundation for a university at Prague for which he signed the charter in 1348. It originally embraced all the four Faculties of Theology, Law, Medicine, and Arts under one Rector as at Paris; but the law students rebelled against the rigour of control exercised by the Archbishop of Prague as Chancellor, and in 1372 they were allowed to form a separate university under a Rector of their own, where they could enjoy the student liberties of Bologna and Padua. Each of the two universities was divided into four nations: (1) Bohemia, (2) Poland, which included Prussia and East Germany, (3) Bavaria,

which included the whole of South Germany, (4) Saxony, which included Scandinavia and the German States adjacent to Bohemia.

The University of Prague achieved renown at once and attracted students from all over Europe. The original teachers were nearly all Bohemian, but, with the growth of the university, teachers of eminence were brought in from abroad. Gradually the colleges founded by Charles and his successor, Wencelas IV, became filled with German students because Germany was not yet culturally advanced enough to enjoy a university of its own, and the nation-organization gave them the preponderant voting power.

In 1384 the Czech students petitioned the King and the Archbishop, and an order was made by the Archbishop that in future only Bohemians should be admitted to places on the college foundation. The Germanic nations thereupon appealed to the Pope. The German Rector suspended all lectures. The Czechs refused to obey. Brawls began, in one of which the German Rector was beaten up. The dispute deepened when the Bohemian nation of the university became identified with the reform movement which, under the scandal of two rival Pontiffs, was growing. In Paris the most orthodox theologians were pressing for the compulsory retirement of both Pontiffs. In Oxford the Wycliffite movement was strong. In Prague, where the leading theologians of the university held parochial cures and preached in Czech, reform took the direction of strengthening the religious life of the people. This exacerbated national feeling, and the German theologians took the side of reaction.

Besides theological and racial incompatibility there were philosophic differences. The Germans, who had formerly made Paris their university, brought to Prague the Nominalism which had spread from Oxford to Paris. The Czechs, therefore, became advocates of Realism, and by the year 1402 John Hus came to the front scholastically as an exponent of Wycliffe's new post-Ockhamite Realism. Wycliffe's reputation as a philosopher gained adherents in the schools of the Czech masters, and John Hus, who in 1403 was Rector of the university, became the champion of Wycliffe's orthodoxy. Politics now entered upon the scene. In 1409 the incomplete Synod of Pisa deposed both the Avignon Pope Benedict XIII and the Roman Pope Gregory XII and elected the aged Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, a Greek, as Alexander V. So there were now three rival Pontiffs, to which were presently added three rival kings of the Romans. One of these was Wenceslas, King of Bohemia. Another was his brother Sigismund, King of Hungary. Wenceslas proclaimed his neutrality in the Papal Schism, which upset

the Archbishop of Prague and his clergy, who had given their allegiance to Gregory XII. The King turned for support to the university, but as the Germans controlled the voting by three nations to one he got no academic help. Hus waited upon the King with a deputation from the Czech nation and begged for a change of the voting-power of the nations in the interest of the King's own subjects. The King agreed, and in 1409 a Royal decree commanded that in future the Czech nation should have three votes and the other three nations one between them. The Germans were furious and notified the King of their intention to withdraw from Prague if the decree were not rescinded. The King refused. The German Rector was ordered to surrender the insignia of office to a Czech. In one day the whole of the German masters and students withdrew from Prague to the number of 5000, the greater part of them to found the purely German University of Leipzig. When in 1415 John Hus was condemned by the Council of Constance for heresy and burned at the stake his bitterest opponents were found among these German seceders.

"By a strange irony of fate," writes Rashdall,¹ "Hus, though he professed to accept the doctrine of Transubstantiation, was condemned because the Nominalists of the fifteenth century had persuaded themselves that a Realist could not firmly hold in its integrity a doctrine which owed its existence as an article of Faith to the extravagant Realism of an earlier age. . . . At the Council of Constance the very men who had been beaten in the encounter with Hus and his party at Prague clamoured for his blood. The national insult of 1409 was wiped out at Constance. The Bohemian nation itself fell a prey to the racial animosities which had been so loudly emphasized and so sorely aggravated—though unquestionably they had not been engendered—in the scholastic debates, the academic parties, and the student street-fights of the Bohemian capital."

Enlightened Catholic opinion has for a long time questioned the justice of the verdict against Hus and recognized it as due to the desire for revenge of the discomfited Germans, to which must be added the dread of highly placed ecclesiastics lest his teaching should subvert authority.

Pastor writes:²

"The opinions of the Bohemian leaders, like those of Wycliffe, must necessarily have led in practice to social revolution, and one of which

¹ *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press, 1936), Vol. II, Part I, p. 227.

² *History of the Popes* (Kegan Paul, 1939), Vol. I, pp. 162, 163.

the end could be foreseen, since the right to possess property was made dependent on religious opinion. . . . Argument is needless to show that such a theory destroys all private rights, and the attempt to make these principles—so plausibly deduced from the doctrines of the Christian religion—serve as the rule for the foundation of a new social order, must lead to the most terrible consequences. . . . The results of the opinions promulgated by Hus soon became apparent in the Bohemian Revolution, in which the idea of a democratic Republic and of a social system based on communistic principles took practical form. The international range of Czech radicalism, which also soon made itself terribly apparent in Germany, was exposed in clear and forcible terms on New Year's Day 1424, by an envoy of the Cardinal Legate in his address to the Polish King.

“‘They aim,’ he said, ‘at the forcible destruction of all Divine and human rights, and it will come to pass that neither kings nor princes in their dominions, citizens in their cities, nor even people in their own houses, will be secure against their insolence. This abominable heresy not only attacks the Faith and the Church, but, impelled by the devil, makes war upon humanity at large, whose rights it assails and destroys.’”

These words might have been quoted from a discourse of five centuries later designed to suggest that the Czechoslovak Republic was the main conduit for Bolshevik poison.

It is beyond the scope of this book to give a detailed account of the Hussite wars. So far as Hitler's half-baked history is concerned it is enough to quote from Dr Kamil Krofta's study of Bohemia in the fifteenth century in the *Cambridge Mediæval History*:

“The Hussite struggle did not, indeed, drive all the Germans out of Bohemia and Moravia, but the privileged position which they enjoyed out of proportion to their actual strength and members was utterly lost. In the chief territories of the Czech State, especially in Bohemia, they became an insignificant minority of practically no importance in politics . . . and the Czech national idea was enriched by the thought that the nation, apart from its defensive struggle against the German menace, had had a great positive task laid upon it—a fight for the pure truth of God.”

In 1526 Louis II, King of Bohemia and Hungary, died, and his brother-in-law the Archduke Ferdinand was elected to the throne of Bohemia over several rival candidates. The long Habsburg rule had begun. During the sixteenth century there started a second slow but continuous trickle of German immigration. The mutual antipathy of

Germans and Czechs gave way to the mutual antipathy of Catholics and Protestants. Lutheran Germans allied themselves with the Hussite Czech majority and Catholic Germans with the Catholic Czech minority.

As the century went on the German trickle became a stream. Bohemia offered economic advantages which the immigrants crossing the mountains could not enjoy in Germany. The Czechs began to take alarm at the prospect. In 1615 the Estates issued a decree making the learning of Czech compulsory for all children in Bohemia and disinheriting those who could not speak the language. This meant that no foreigner ignorant of Czech could become a citizen of any town or own any land in the kingdom. Three years later the Estates paradoxically sought to avoid the Germanizing influence of a cosmopolitan Habsburg by electing to the throne of Bohemia the leader of the German Calvinists, Frederick V of the Palatinate, the son-in-law of the King of England and Scotland. How far this defiance of the Habsburgs and the Catholic League was due to a championship of Protestantism, how far it was an attempt to combat the growing centralization of their Habsburg rulers, it is not easy to estimate. However, with the struggle to the death between the Union of Protestant Princes and the Catholic League impending, we can fairly compare the situation of Bohemia at that date with the situation of Czechoslovakia in 1938, when the Republic was once again the victim of another struggle to the death between two ideologies. And it is interesting to note the same curious reluctance to face up to implications three centuries earlier. The Union of Protestant Princes remained neutral when the Emperor Ferdinand proposed to attack Frederick. His father-in-law, King James I and VI, instead of sending help, spent some months studying the Czech constitution to discover if the Crown was really elective. Then he offered to act as mediator and sent envoys to Vienna. After the complete defeat of the Czechs in the Battle of the White Mountain on November 8th, 1620, the tale went that a messenger was telling the Viennese courtiers that King Frederick would soon have a great army: the King of Denmark would send him a hundred thousand, the Dutch a hundred thousand, and his father-in-law, King James, a hundred thousand. "A hundred thousand of what?" the messenger was asked. He replied, "The King of Denmark will send a hundred thousand red herrings, the Dutch will send a hundred thousand cheeses, and the King of England will send a hundred thousand envoys." A hundred thousand 'Runcimen' they might have been called three centuries later.

The result of the Battle of Bílá Hora (the White Mountain) was out of all proportion to the battle itself, which, compared with so many others of the Thirty Years War, was hardly more than a skirmish and over in an hour. Nevertheless, it was able to place a nation in subjection for three hundred years.

The subsequent re-Catholicization of Bohemia by the Habsburgs with the aid of the Jesuits was a very thorough process, and the thoroughness of it is evidence of the importance attached to the position of Bohemia in Europe not merely as a strategic point in the warfare of opposing armies, but as a strategic point in the warfare of contending beliefs.

The re-Catholicization was so complete, however, that the antagonism between the Czechs and the Germans was not exacerbated by that. There is no hint of religious divergence as a contributing factor to that antagonism. The gradual establishment of the Czechs as an 'inferior' race at the service of a German ascendancy was due to the centralizing tendency of Vienna and the official eminence accorded to the German language. The same process was pursued by England in her incorporation of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. In the Austrian Empire the Catholic Church supported submission to central authority under the specious appearance of upholding law and order. Vienna was the outward visible sign of a political authority to which she clung. In Ireland the Catholic Church was the support of a race under the heel of a Protestant and alien ascendancy, and there the national aspiration to freedom has remained inextricably confused with religious antagonism. Apostolic fervour was nowhere in Europe less warm than in the domains of His Apostolic Majesty the Emperor, and with the progress of the years it grew steadily more chill.

Yet an eloquent denunciation of Habsburg centralization came from one of those very Jesuits who were responsible for the re-Catholicizing of Bohemia. In about the year 1670 Bohuslav Balbín wrote a tract to complain of the decline of the Czech language, and thus apostrophizes the House of Habsburg:

"You have utterly destroyed our home, our ancient Kingdom, and have built us no new one in its place. Woe to you! Some day you will have to render an account for the heritage you have received. How rich it was when first you had it all men know, and you have brought it but ruin and disgrace. The nobles you have oppressed, great cities made small. Of smiling towns you have made straggling villages, of pleasant towns rows of wretched hovels. Where before happy craftsmen laboured, now hungry, starving wrecks of men stalk the

weeded paths. You are indeed the father of your country. No true statesman would ever treat his court as you have treated the Czech Kingdom, once so prosperous, all of whose beauties and sources of revenue have been pillaged. I can call all the extortion and violence which I see going on every day nothing else than pillage. The court at Vienna, its appetite whetted by the sweet savour of Czech money, cries out daily: 'Give us more, give us more.'"¹

Owing to the censorship this tract was not published for nearly a century, in the reign of the reforming Emperor Joseph II, when the Jesuits were suppressed by Pope Clement XIV. By that time Czech had sunk to the status of a peasant's tongue, and though Joseph himself spoke it he spoke it as a few Highland lairds speak Gaelic—to give an impression of an intimacy with their dependents which they have long outlived. It was an ex-Jesuit priest, Josef Dobrovský, who took the first step to rescue the language, by publishing in German his *History of the Bohemian Language and Literature* in the year 1792. The renaissance began.

In 1836 František Palacký published the first volume of his great *History of Bohemia*, the tenth and final volume of which was published in 1865, by which time he had reached as far as the accession of the Habsburgs in 1526.

"The *History of Bohemia*," says Dr Seton-Watson,² "was Palacký's real life-work and made him the father of his people: it was this achievement, whose full value can only be realized in the setting of an enslaved nation, a long-neglected language, a hostile church and a denationalized middle-class, that thrust upon him, with that suddenness which revolutions evoke, the political leadership of a new epoch."

In the fiery year of 1848 unrest showed itself in Prague four days before the Revolution in Vienna brought about the fall of Metternich.

The Pan-Germans in the Federation of the German States which had succeeded to the quiet demise of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 began to agitate for Austria to join them, with the slogan "Austria will be German or Austria will cease to be." While a new Austrian Constitution was being hastily launched to nullify at once the Pan-German threat and allay the separatist agitation in Hungary, the Preliminary Parliament of the German Federation sitting at Frankfurt-on-Maine invited Palacký, as the acknowledged leader of the Czechs, to bring the representatives of Bohemia to the Parliament.

¹ Quoted by S. Harrison Thomson in *Czechoslovakia in European History*, p. 73.

² *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks* (Hutchinson, 1943), p. 177.

The words in which he declined this invitation are of profound significance:

"The object of your assembly is to establish a federation of the German nation in place of the existing federation of princes, to guide the nation to real unity, to strengthen the sentiment of German national consciousness and in this manner expand the power and strength of the German Reich. . . . I am not a German; . . . I am a Czech of Slavonic blood . . .—that nation is a small one, it is true, but from time immemorial it has been a nation by itself and depends upon its own strength. Its rulers were from ancient times members of the federation of German princes, but the nation never regarded itself as belonging to the German nation, nor throughout all these centuries has it been regarded by others as so belonging. The whole union of the Czech lands, first with the Holy Roman Empire, and then with the German Confederation, was always a mere dynastic tie of which the Czech nation and the Czech Estates took no real cognizance, and which had little effect upon them. This is a fact as well known to German historians as to myself. Even if it were to be fully accepted as true that the Bohemian Crown had at one time been in feudal relationship to the German Empire—a contention which Czech publicists have always denied—it could not occur to any well-informed historian to doubt that, so far as internal affairs are concerned, the Government and land of Bohemia were originally completely sovereign and independent. . . . If anyone asks that, over and above this heretofore existing bond between princes, the Czech nation should now unite with the German nation, that is at the very least a novel demand, devoid of any historical or juridical basis, a demand to which I, so far as I personally am concerned, would not feel justified in acceding until I receive an express and authentic mandate to do so. . . .

"In conclusion . . . I must briefly express my conviction that those who ask that Austria, and with her Bohemia, should unite on national lines with Germany, are demanding that she should commit suicide—a step lacking either moral or political sense. . . ."

However, Palacký saw no advantage for the Czechs in deserting Austria to support Hungary:

"If Hungary, following her inclinations, breaks away from the Monarchy, or what is nearly the same thing, becomes the centre of gravity of the Monarchy, will Hungary, who refuses to hear of national equality of rights within her own borders, be able to maintain herself permanently free and strong? Only the just man is truly free and strong. But there can be no question of a voluntary union, still less of com-

pulsory union, on the part of the Danubian Slavs and Wallachs, or even of the Poles, with a state which lays down the principle that before all one must be a Magyar, and a man only as a secondary consideration. . . .

"Assuredly if the Austrian State had not existed for ages it would have been incumbent upon us in the interests of Europe, and indeed of humanity, to endeavour to create it as soon as possible. . . . In the unhappy blindness that has long afflicted her, Austria has long failed to recognize the real juridical and moral basis of her existence, and has denied it; the fundamental rule, that is, that all the nationalities and all the religions under her sceptre should enjoy complete equality of rights and respect in common . . . even now it is not too late for this fundamental rule of justice, this *sacra ancora* for a vessel in danger of foundering, to be publicly and sincerely proclaimed in the Austrian Empire and energetically carried out in all sections with the consent and support of all. . . .

"If Europe is to be saved, Vienna must not sink to the rôle of a provincial town. If there exist in Vienna people who ask to have your Frankfurt as their capital, we can only cry: Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they ask! . . ."

This was no narrow nationalism that Palacký preached. No monarch ever ascended a mighty throne with such an opportunity to benefit humanity as that young emperor Francis Joseph was given in the November of that fiery year of 1848: no monarch ever left behind so little good and so much evil for European remembrance after the longest reign in recorded history.

In 1849 Palacký put forward before the constitutional convention a scheme for a federal empire by which it would be divided into eight provinces: (1) German-Austrian; (2) Czech and Slovak; (3) Polish, including Bukovina and Ruthenia; (4) Slovene districts of Illyria; (5) Italian; (6) Croatian and Dalmatian; (7) Magyar; (8) Rumanian.

It should be noted that the Czech and Slovak union seemed natural and that Palacký expressed willingness to separate Germans from Czechs in Bohemia if it could be managed. He pointed out, however, that Bohemia was a basin and could not be divided up without being broken.

Ireland is another example of a basin-country, and the Sudeten Germans have their counterpart in the planted Scots of Ulster. Perhaps that is why the Sudeten Germans received such sympathy from the Conservative Party.

After Francis Joseph had overcome the Hungarian revolt with the help of 180,000 Russians lent him by the Tsar, he put himself entirely in the hands of the most reactionary advisors and rejected the Palacký scheme in favour of a more rigidly centralized absolutism than ever. The most brilliant advocate of Palacký's Liberalism was the young Czech journalist Karel Havlíček. He used Daniel O'Connell's struggle in Ireland to express his ideals for Bohemia and thus escape the censorship. Later he founded a paper of his own, but this was suppressed, and he was banished to Brixen, near Innsbruck, being refused permission to return home to see his dying wife and only released when he was dying himself in 1856. It was he who wrote:

"Austria will be what we want her to be, or she will cease to be. The bayonets beyond which you hide, they are *we*, our people. They do not know it to-day, but to-morrow, in a year, in a few years, they *will* know. Our partisans counted yesterday by hundreds, now they count by thousands, soon they will be millions."

Among those millions was a Slovak baby born in Moravia, on March 7th, 1850, the son of a coachman on an Imperial estate which had belonged to the Jesuits before the dissolution of the Order and of a Slovak mother, Terezie Kropáček, who at one time had been a servant in Vienna. The name of this baby was Thomas Masaryk. Thirty-four years later, on May 28th, 1884, sixteen days after Smetana's death and a year after the opening of the Czech National Theatre, another of those millions was born—a Czech baby in Bohemia, the tenth child of Matěj Beneš and his wife Anna Beneš, who owned and cultivated ten acres of land. At that date Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, who had married an American wife and added her name to his own, had been for some eighteen months a Professor-in-Extraordinary of Philosophy at the recently reconstituted Czech University of Prague. Germans had long since swamped the university from which they had withdrawn themselves nearly five centuries earlier, and this Czech university was a sop to Bohemia and Moravia offered by the Imperial Government that since 1867 had committed itself to the fatal dualism which provided that Austria and Hungary, at the expense of all the other nationalities, should direct the course of the empire.

"In 1884," Masaryk told Karel Čapek, "came the following incident. I had had a pupil in Vienna called Flesch, the son of a well-known Brno manufacturer. He followed me to Prague and continued to attend my lectures. He was a strange, melancholy youth. By and by he went away to Berlin, and there he shot himself. In his will he left me his money. I came to an understanding with his family about it and

received a legacy of about sixty thousand florins. That kept me afloat. I was able to pay my debts, help my parents, set up my brother in a printing works at Hustopeč, and start the *Athenæum*—the money didn't last long!"

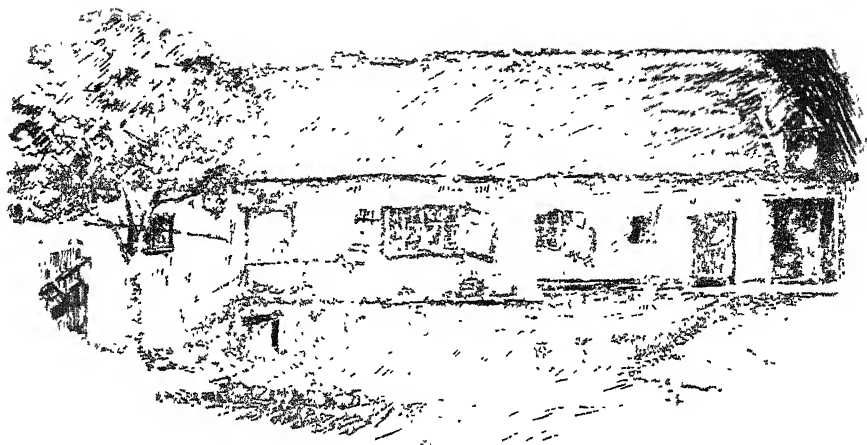
So in that year of 1884 Masaryk's future was endowed both by death and by life—by the death of one pupil and the birth of another.

CHAPTER II

THE name Beneš is the equivalent of our Bennet. It is an old Czech surname and goes back at least to the fourteenth century. Žižka, the blind leader of the Hussites, had a supporter called Nikola Beneš who had a castle near Šlovice. Matěj (Matthew) Beneš, the father of Edvard, was a Šlovice man, but he claimed no descent from Nikola. He was a peasant-farmer; his father and grandfather and all his progenitors as far back as they could be traced had been peasants like himself. Some ten miles from Šlovice, in the north-west corner of Bohemia, was the village of Kožlany. Here lived a distant relation of Matěj, Anna Beneš, whom Matěj married. It was a good match. She had a small wooden house with a thatched roof and a few acres of land for a dowry. Edvard was the tenth and youngest child of this couple, and he had five brothers.

During Edvard's childhood his father gradually acquired land up to forty acres, started a general store, and finally launched out with a small but profitable brick-kiln. Edvard himself showed no signs of following in his father's footsteps. From earliest youth books were his passion. Although he came from a country that seemed to Neville Chamberlain so far away and unintelligible to an Englishman, his earliest reading probably differed little from the earliest reading of Neville Chamberlain himself. *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the rest of them stirred his fancy once upon a time. Some of Edvard's elder brothers had visions of life beyond Kožlany. The parish priest, observing this inclination of Matěj to give his sons a better education than he himself had had, once reminded him that to rear a family for the intelligentsia required money. Some years later, when the priest was urging his parishioners to rebuild the priest's house and asked Matěj to contribute plenty of bricks from his new brick-kiln, Matěj replied that bricks required money just as much as education.

However, if Matěj could not resist scoring off his parish priest, he and his wife were devout Catholics and for a while planned to make a priest of their youngest child. Edvard became an altar-boy after he made his first communion at the age of ten and experienced at an age earlier than most that strange emotional phenomenon we call conversion. It was too early. Reaction succeeded, but not reaction of the usual type. Generally the emotional stress of these youthful con-



THE COTTAGE WHERE THE PRESIDENT WAS BORN

Under its thatched roof the ten children of Anna and Matěj Beneš were born. After a fire that broke out next door Beneš's parents had the cottage pulled down and replaced it by a brick building. A memorial tablet marks the place to-day.

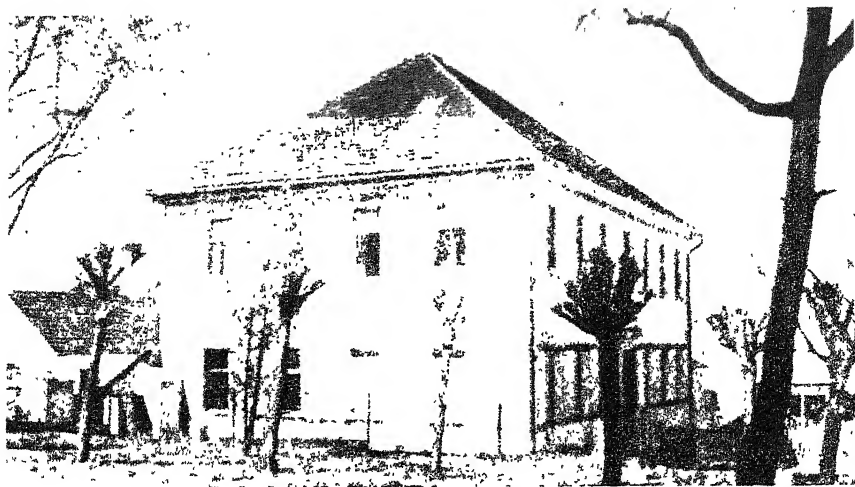


MATĚJ BENEŠ

Dr Beneš's father was a peasant farmer.



ANNA BENEŠOVÁ
Dr Beneš's mother.



THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN KOŽLANY
Here Dr Beneš received his first education.



THE COLLEGE IN VINOHRADY, PRAGUE
Here Dr Beneš underwent his secondary education.



EDVARD BENEŠ AT COLLEGE

In spite of his absorption in books he had a passion for Association football.



EDVARD BENEŠ, 1905
He studies law at the Sorbonne.



HANNA VLČKOVÁ
In Paris Edvard Beneš meets the future Mme Beneš.



LIBRARY HALL AT THE CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
At this University Edvard Beneš graduated as a student of law.

versions takes another direction under the problems with which puberty complicates the development of the growing boy. The young Edvard Beneš did not turn away from religion because it was incompatible with the emotional claims made by self in the interest of its own indulgence, but because in due course familiarity gradually spoiled the magic. The lifting of the priest's chasuble at the elevation of the Host or the pouring of the water from the cruets over the priest's fingers at the Ablutions became too much a matter of course. The emotion which had welled up after his first communion could not contend with the sands of ritualistic observance, and it was lost in a seeming aridity. On top of that this bright observant child watched the behaviour of some of his companions when they were away from Church, and he could not reconcile what it was with what it ought to be if their service at the altar was in very truth a participation in Divine rites.

It was about this time that the boy wrote an ode to John Hus. It was the Hus of Czech nationalism, however, who inspired his precocious enthusiasm; it was not the heretic. It was the Hus who was burned through the malevolence of his German academic rivals, not the Hus whose doctrine was condemned by theologians on what nowadays seems most doubtful testimony—as doubtful, indeed, as the testimony which brought Joan of Arc to the scaffold for witchcraft. In fact, Edvard was already engaged in fighting with the small Germans in the neighbourhood.

The Germans of Bohemia considered themselves a superior race to the Czechs, into whose land they had overflowed. The break-up of the native Czech aristocracy after the Battle of the White Mountain facilitated the illusion. The great landed estates were almost all held by Germans, and such Czech aristocrats as remained had intermarried so much with Austrian families that they had lost their distinctive characteristics as the Scottish lairds lost theirs by surrendering to fashionable English education. The Czechs of Bohemia became predominantly a race of peasants with the qualities and defects of peasants the world over.

There were moments when Dr Beneš, whom many would consider the most astute statesman in Europe, seemed to be judging the political situation as a peasant judges the weather. I seemed to perceive beyond all his worldly wisdom the profounder wisdom of the countryman animating him. This was not the intuition in which Hitler indulged: it was as if he were listening to the heart of Europe. On one occasion we were talking about Stalin, for whom Dr Beneš has a shrewd admiration and, as I surmise, a warm affection, and I had a momentary

vision of these men as two countrymen on either side of a fire discussing a deal in corn or cattle and chaffing one another as camouflage for the mutual respect they felt for one another as sharp men of business.

But this is running too far ahead of Kožlany in the mid-nineties of the last century, when the young Edvard was beginning to ask himself why he should accept as a matter of course the arrogant German claim to superiority of status. The fights with small Germans in the neighbourhood were repeated at intervals. His mother disapproved of fighting, but the punishment for it was always more severe when her young son had taken a beating from the enemy. In 1895 Edvard had outgrown the village school in Kožlany, and it was settled that he should go to the technical school in Prague, boarding with his brother Václav. By this time Matěj's youngest boy had shown clearly that he had no vocation for the priesthood, and no doubt, in spite of that passion for books, his father, under advice from Edvard's elder brothers in Prague, decided that the technical school would provide a more practical education. The technical school had no vacancy, however, and so in the autumn of 1895 Edvard Beneš became a scholar at the Imperial and Royal Gymnasium, or Grammar School, of Vinohrady. He was eleven and a half years old, and a tough lad.

Like so many clever boys the young scholar preferred the books he chose for himself to those chosen for him by his masters, and in consequence of this his place in examinations had a tendency to fall lower and lower as soon as the novelty of the Gymnasium wore off. At thirteen he decided that he did not like nicotine. At fourteen after drinking too much at an end-of-the-school-year celebration he resolved to give up alcohol. He has never been a smoker or a drinker since, but without the least intolerance of others less naturally ascetic than himself. He seems to have lived mostly a book-reading life apart from his contemporaries, but he was a great arguer both with fellow-students and teachers, and, as one would expect, usually arguing on behalf of minority opinion. His nationalism was strengthened by the fact that the rich boys were always representative of conventional Austrian opinion, and he regarded most of the professors with contempt as paid servants of Austria. Three teachers were able to deal with the self-assertive boy because the subjects they expounded interested him. These were the professors of philosophy, of history, and of the Czech language and literature.

When Edvard was fifteen his father retired from active work on his farm in favour of his son Bedřich and divided the money he had saved among the others. Edvard's share came to 600 kronen, which at that

date would have been the equivalent of about £25. To-day it would be a good deal less. After this Edvard paid his brother Václav 20 crowns a month for his board and lodging. He earned extra money for himself by coaching other boys. In spite of his absorption in books he had a passion for Association football and not only played with his school team but joined the Slavia team—the equivalent of our Corinthians or Casuals—to play outside left. This was against the rules of the Gymnasium, but it was not found out until he broke his leg in one game and was taken to hospital. Even here he kept his football activities hidden from his teachers, fearing expulsion, and managed to stay in the hospital six weeks before the Gymnasium authorities found out where he was. Finally he arrived back at school with the support of two sticks and was condemned to *carcer*, or imprisonment for four hours, with a black mark against his name. The black mark meant he was deprived of his scholarship, and that involved paying tuition fees in future; it also involved taking extra examinations, which he found even more disagreeable. Nevertheless, in defiance of the gymnasium rules he began to play football again six months later and continued to do so until he went to the university. He also played lawn-tennis at the Gymnasium. Yet, in spite of his athletic ability, he gave up all games on going to the university, where he had too many plans for the mind to allow the body any amusement which might distract his mental preoccupation.

In the summer of 1904 he left the Gymnasium with this report:

BENEŠ, EDVARD: Born May 28th, 1884, at Kožlany (Bohemia). Catholic. Attended the Imperial and Royal Czech Gymnasium at Vinohrady from 1896-97 to 1903-4. He completed his secondary studies at this school and appears before the competent authorities for his matriculation examination for the first time. His examiners have granted him the following certificate. Conduct, satisfactory. Religion, fair. Latin, good. Greek, good. Czech, good. History and geography, fair. Mathematics, good. Physics, fairly good. Natural science, good. Elements of Philosophy, good. Gymnastics, fairly good. German, good. French (not compulsory), good. Shorthand (Second Section, not compulsory), fairly good.

The candidate has fulfilled all the regulations and conditions; he is, therefore, awarded the present certificate of matriculation, which permits him to matriculate at the University.

VINOHRADY

July 9, 1904

CHAPTER III

THE childhood of Edvard Beneš may be called superficially uninteresting. What does it apparently consist of? The youngest of a large family has a passion for absorbing information from books, which he is allowed to indulge at the expense of the small domestic tasks in the house and in the fields that usually fall to the lot of the youngest in a peasant-farmer's family. His father and mother—like so many fathers and mothers in similar circumstances—cherish for a while an ambition that he will be found to have a vocation for the priesthood. It becomes obvious before he is eleven that not only has he no vocation for such a calling but that he is developing a positively anti-clerical bias to which is added a gradual rejection of all revealed religion. God Himself becomes a reactionary superstition whose existence must be denied. Yet his scholastic career provides no compensation by the brilliance of its achievement—at any rate no obvious compensation in the shape of academic prizes.

At the age of twenty he is qualified to proceed to the university, but the qualifications are not more conspicuous than those of many of his contemporaries and a good deal less conspicuous than those of some. Nevertheless, he does not idle away his time. He does not fritter away what little money he has. He is passionately industrious, indeed. But to what purpose? What secret ambition feeds this secluded and ascetic existence, acquisitive only of knowledge? The plausible answer is that long before anybody else suspected it the determination to revive his nation was shaping itself not so much consciously, perhaps, as instinctively. This is borne out by the fact that for a year or two he contemplated becoming an actor, not because he had the faintest talent for acting nor because he was stage-struck, but because the theatre seemed to offer a medium to stir up his countrymen to national awareness. It might be rash to presume that his loss of faith was brought about by the alliance of the Church, as it seemed, with the Viennese political and social ascendancy; but it would certainly be true to argue that such an alliance made him emotionally indifferent to that loss of faith, and therefore facilitated the shaking off of what such a youth would consider a handicap to the free development of his mood. And if at sixteen young Beneš was captivated by radicalism and socialism and was celebrating the First of May with a red flower

in his buttonhole to defy his schoolfellows that was because radicalism and socialism were frowned upon by the Austrian Ascendancy and the Church.

There must have been a long period during which the imagination of the youthful Beneš was already coloured by nationalist dreams, because almost from the moment he entered the university he set before himself a clear aim. That aim was to become a professor and after that to enter politics as a champion of the Czech revival. The immediate objective was a professorship, and Beneš wasted no time in the romantics of nationalism. Not for him student demonstrations against the actions of the Viennese bureaucracy. Not for him the building and populating of nationalist Utopias in talk interminable. Not for him the *au-delà* of Pan-Slav dreams. Whatever spare time he could contrive to find from his pursuit of knowledge he devoted to journalism in order to obtain the necessary funds for the feverish pursuit of knowledge. The busiest bee never displayed more diligence in the pursuit of honey.

Young Beneš had been introduced to Madame Masaryk while he was still at the Gymnasium. A journalistic friend of his called Krystinek had been the medium. Krystinek told Charlotte Masaryk of this boy's passion for knowledge and of his poverty. That gifted and remarkable woman took a fancy to him, divining perhaps, as women so often do, the potentiality of youth. She told her husband about him, and Masaryk got him translating work for the Czech review *Naše Doba*. At the university he attended Masaryk's lectures, but always critically. In so far as Masaryk was considered a dangerous influence by the Austrian Government, Beneš was in sympathy with him, but he was not prepared to surrender his own individuality and be counted as a blind follower of Masaryk's teaching. He admired Masaryk's humanitarian theories, but he suspected his Protestantism as emotional food for the mind. Beneš's view of emotion was rather like an electrician's view of a mountain torrent. Beneš himself was probably much more emotional than Masaryk, and, therefore, he was afraid of emotion. So it was harnessed to power: it was kept fully occupied in charging the dynamo of that mind which the owner worked so mercilessly.

Before he had been a few months at the University of Prague the young student decided that the process of staying there four years to obtain his doctor's degree at the end of them was too slow. He was learning more from the books he read than from the lectures he listened to. Indeed, except for Masaryk and a positivist called Krejčí he soon ceased to attend any. Beneš decided to go to Paris and obtain a degree

from the Sorbonne while he was working in France for his Prague doctorate. If he could manage it he would visit London and Berlin as well, and thus begin to provide illustrations for the books he was reading so fast and so insatiably. One of the difficulties about leaving Prague was military service. He got leave to postpone that to his twenty-fourth year, but the understanding was that he was studying for his degree in Prague. He was not expected to leave Austria. However, he put the problem of military service on one side to solve the more difficult problem of how he was to keep himself in Paris while he was working for his degree. He managed at last to obtain a promise from the editor of a Socialist paper in Prague called *Právo Lidu* that if he would send him articles from Paris those which were published would be paid for. With this promise and thirty francs over his railway-fare young Beneš left Kožlany for Paris in the month of August 1905. He was twenty-one years old.

Five centuries earlier students had thronged from all over Europe to the young University of Prague, herself a daughter of the University of Paris. In those days the Germans had not achieved as much culture as would provide them with a university of their own that could compete with Paris or Prague, with Oxford or Bologna. In the end they had succeeded in Germanizing Prague after securing the condemnation of John Hus, who had been the cause of their temporary secession. Under the Habsburgs, Prague had taken on more and more the characteristics of a provincial university, and since the recent foundation of two universities—one for Germans and the other for Czechs—this provincialism had been more evident. Provincialism is the invariable result of a national part within a larger whole: the phenomenon can be observed in Scotland, where the ancient Universities of St Andrew's, Glasgow, and Aberdeen, offer an education hardly distinguishable from the modern universities promoted from university-colleges whose academic domes and cupolas are scattered like mushrooms over England.

Young Edvard Beneš, who by now had planned to enter politics at the age of forty-five, required twenty-five years in his own opinion to equip himself for the kind of politics on which his mind was set. To him the majority of Czech politicians appeared ill-fitted for anything except municipal politics. They lacked worldly knowledge. They accepted an inferior status at the hands of the Viennese Ascendancy. That twenty-one-year-old student intended to arm himself against that Austrian superiority. Vienna might have a greater standing in Europe than Prague; but beside Paris what was Vienna in the twentieth

century? And so, himself like one of those wandering scholars of the Middle Ages, Edvard Beneš came to Paris with his thirty francs and put up at a small hotel in the Latin Quarter. From the French authorities in Prague he had obtained an exemption from matriculation fees. As a Czech he was not entitled to an allowance for tuition fees: that was a concession made only to Germans.

As soon as he reached Paris he wrote his first article for *Právo Lidu*, and for six weeks he continued sending articles to Prague, before the end of which time the thirty francs had been exhausted and he was beginning to wonder if the plan he had made for his education was stillborn. Then came a letter from the Editor of *Právo Lidu* commissioning a weekly article at ten kronen—the equivalent of less than ten shillings—to be paid on publication but without any guarantee of publication. Yet, the sanguine young man had no doubt whatever that his plan for education was safely financed. He left the hotel and took a minute room, a cell in an old cloister in the Rue Tournefort—Number 19. It was *vie de Bohème*—but a very ascetic Bohemian's life. Two chairs, a table, and a camp-bed with a few shelves for books. Soon the books overflowed from the shelves and were stacked against the walls: then there was no room for them against the walls, and they were stacked on the floor. They were not expensive books. Few of them cost more than two sous, but plenty of books worth reading and marking could be bought for two sous or a sou apiece in those book-stalls along the left bank of the Seine.

The poor scholar is too ancient a theme on which to dilate any more. Enough to say that young Beneš performed the part in the traditional style. He cooked for himself, made his own bed, and kept his room clean.

He attended courses in language and literature at the Sorbonne, read voraciously, and wrote articles to sustain himself. His articles began to make an impression. He heard that the great Masaryk had often expressed approval of them. His editor allowed him more and more liberty. At first anything he said that was not socialistic enough for *Právo Lidu* was cut out, and the articles were unsigned. Later on his name was considered an asset. Then a Brno paper called *Rovnost* commissioned a weekly article. He also occasionally had articles in the French reviews about the Czechs and their national hopes. The process of teaching the rest of Europe something about Bohemia had already begun. He was now earning a regular thirty shillings a week by his journalism, and presently he found out that the University of Dijon granted to foreigners the degree of Doctor of Laws in two years. So, as if he were not working hard enough, he decided to study law.

That meant he was now reading Philosophy for Prague, Letters at the Sorbonne, and Law for Dijon.

Notwithstanding the fantastic amount of reading and writing he had set himself the young student—it is difficult to imagine how—found time to meet plenty of people in Paris, among others many of the Russians who had left their country after the 1905 Revolution. The discussion of political theory with Russians is one of the most voracious devourers of time that humanity has discovered.

“My contact with them made a deep impression on me,” Beneš wrote in *My War Memoirs*. “In 1906 and 1907 I visited their meetings at Paris, becoming a member of their societies. I began to make a close study of Russia and of Russian literature, both classical and revolutionary. After my return to Prague I kept in touch with the revolutionary Russians.”

On top of the Russian revolutionaries, the French syndicalists, anti-clericals, and anti-militarists, the cosmopolitan artists and scientists, as if that busy little young man had not enough work for his brain and hands and ears and tongue, the eternal feminine supervened in 1906.

At one of the Russian circles he had got to know a Czech journalist called Švihovský, who told Beneš about three charming Czech girls in Paris he ought to meet. They were anxious to find out how to enrol themselves as students at the Sorbonne. Thus was the trap baited, and of course the education-fever of young Beneš could not resist it. One of the girls turned out to be Švihovský's own fiancée, Ludmila Smolík. Ludmila had a cousin called Anna Olič, who was the daughter of the Chief of Police in Prague. Anna had a friend called Hanna Vlček, the daughter of a railwayman whose sister had taken her niece to live with her, and given her some of the advantages of prosperous *bourgeoisie*. The three girls had decided to leave Prague for a while and study in Paris.

So far they were to be encouraged; but when the ascetic and much preoccupied young man discovered that the three girls were inclined to make demands on his time he grew indignant. As a young revolutionary full of ardour for a way of life to the successful promulgation of which the *bourgeoisie* was the main obstacle, he was amazed to be asked to cultivate socially the daughter of the Chief of Police in Prague. That a Czech should debase his national pride to serve in such a post shocked him. There are no people more abhorrent to the nationalist than fellow-nationals who co-operate with an Ascendancy. The enemy himself is less hated than the enemy's camp-followers. Edvard Beneš lost no time in impressing upon Miss Anna Olič that

he had no use whatever for Miss Olič's father. No doubt he passed from a particular denunciation of the Chief of Police to a general denunciation of the social and mental attitude of the *bourgeoisie*. No doubt the three young women deplored the young extremist's bad manners, but equally there is no doubt that they were attracted by his personality, and following the immemorial way of the eternal feminine they tried to make him look after himself better. It was no use for Beneš to protest that he desired to be left alone. Two of the girls might have been defeated by his objection to becoming refined, but Hanna Vlček had a will as strong as his own, and gradually through that spring and summer of 1906 he saw more and more of her. Not even that dynamic young man with all his ambitions for his future career neatly laid out in his mind was proof against the influence of Paris upon youth. One day his friend Švihovský told him that Hanna was in love with him, and what shook Beneš even more, that he was in love with Hanna. Beneš decided that his companionship with Hanna must stop. He could not afford to upset the pattern of those ambitions by the emotional disturbance of love. So on the very next day after Švihovský had asked him to face the ultimate implication of his ever-growing intimacy with Hanna he went for a walk with her and explained that the possibility of their marriage was too remote for them to continue like this. He intended to go to London very soon. She was going back to Prague that autumn. They would be separated for a long time. They would be able to make up their minds whether they were prepared to overcome all obstacles if—as he hoped, he was suggesting—they would not forget about each other after a long separation.

Nobody who has heard Dr Beneš could fancy that his fluency was baffled for a moment in the task of finding reason after conclusive reason for applying the ice of common sense to the growing warmth of the personal relationship between the two. However, Hanna brought no counter-arguments to bear. She accepted his appreciation of the emotional state of affairs. She would return to Prague. She would write to him in London.

CHAPTER IV

It was blazingly hot that summer when the university student crossed the Channel, encouraged by a commission from the editor of *Právo Lidu* to write a series of articles on London, to take up his residence for some months in Stamford Street, S.E.

"London, the largest and wealthiest town of the world, is, at the same time, also the most rotten, most immoral as well as the most wretched town of the world. Walk along the most lively streets, see the Strand, Regent Street, Oxford Street, Piccadilly, Hyde Park, or some streets in the City and you will be shocked at the wicked chaos, at this human anthill where one detrudes [*sic*] the other in the race for business and profit without caring a straw about anybody else's doings. . . . Here you can see in its perfection that horrid, inconsiderate, pitiless battle of life, rough and cruel to the extreme. . . .

"Walk through Paris and you will take home the impression of a lovely invigorating walk; there, too, you will see the pitiable fruits of modern civilization and society, but you see them in a different light. You see people eager to enjoy life, striving upward in spite of all materialism, eager and ambitious to act, lively, rebelling against injustice; they demand equality, liberty, happiness, and a merry and healthy life, and they know how to live. After a walk through Paris you will feel that you should help those people in every possible way and you would like to do it; because they are endeavouring to improve their own lot; you yourself feel stimulated and beautiful Paris acts as a further stimulant.

"After a walk through London you feel abhorrence for such a life, your pity and sorrow for these poor creatures turn into disgust, you feel sick, embittered; that human anthill arouses abhorrence in you, and those feelings compel you to leave them alone when you see the passivity, indolence, and resignation of these poor creatures."

The above is an extract from the first article about London by Edvard Beneš published in *Právo Lidu* on October 10th, 1906. The other nine articles published during the last three months of that year are all equally censorious. The Sorbonne student's first impressions of London were not favourable. In 1943 the spade of German propaganda dug out those back numbers of *Právo Lidu* and published those first impressions in a pamphlet printed in Prague.

"The impressions young Beneš, at that time comparatively unspoiled by political intrigue, gained of the social structure of the British Empire were so repulsive that the whole serial represents but one great accusation against capitalistic England. At that time Beneš looked upon England as an organism exploited by a plutocratic upper class, completely rotten in a social sense, and already then overawed by North American supercapitalism. Recent observers of social conditions in England corroborate these statements so that even to-day the value of Beneš's essays cannot be underestimated."

Thus wrote the editors of the reprint in their preface, and that they should suppose what a twenty-two-year-old student wrote after a month or two's acquaintance with London in that heat-exhausted September nearly forty years ago would affect his credit to-day is typical of German naïveté.

Beneš had come to London after that exciting year in Paris which had witnessed the struggle for the disestablishment of the Church. He had been much in the company of revolutionary exiles from Tsarist Russia. The air of Paris was bright with the prospect of social revolution, or so it seemed to an eager young student. He did not realize the full import of that general election in Great Britain at the end of 1905, which had expressed a nation's complete disgust with a decade of Conservative administration.

Nevertheless, in spite of his first disappointment with London the spirit of England slowly revealed itself to his imagination.

"England moved me profoundly by its impressive inner strength, which could be felt on all sides," he was to write¹ one day, "by its harmony and order, by its development towards political and constitutional liberty, by its economic advance, by its endeavour in the national culture to form a harmonious human individuality, and by the strength of religious feeling and conscious religious life which even the average Englishman reveals. This practical experience of religious matters in England then led me to the study of philosophy and theory of knowledge, and also to an anti-positivist change of views in religion."

Was it some innate puritanism in him which responded to the puritanism in England? That puritanism which from another angle had so much depressed him, as when he observed that "Puritan Englishmen do not like to see loose women in the streets as they might hurt their moral feelings. They will not see pictures of nude bodies in shop-windows, will not see Balzac, Zola, and Boccaccio in the bookshops."

¹ *My War Memoirs* (Allen and Unwin, 1928).

Walking from his lodgings in Stamford Street to his pastime of listening to the spouters in Hyde Park, he must have often turned off from the Embankment up Villiers Street into the Strand and noted those surreptitious little shops which pandered to that less admirable side of puritanism. We are apt to forget what a gulf separates the present from that England of 1906. 1906 was much nearer to 1844 than it is to 1944.

Well, whatever the cause Edvard Beneš discovered something in that England which even Munich was unable to destroy, and it was to England he retired when the curtain fell upon that tragedy.

It may be rash to impute personal motives to the actions and opinions of Dr Beneš; but it is not extravagant to connect some of his first depression in London with the discovery that he was missing Hanna Vlček, nor is it extravagant to discover in the change in his point of view about London a letter he received there from Hanna Vlček to announce her return to Paris when the vacation was over. When they met again they had each made the decision that they would in due course get married.

Meanwhile Beneš had chosen as the subject for his thesis at Dijon the relationship between the Czechs and Germans and Austria through the centuries. At that time the struggle for universal suffrage in Austria-Hungary had just been won, and with the victory of democracy Beneš prophesied that Czechs and Slovaks would win their freedom.

In 1907 Beneš set out to spend the vacation in Berlin, taking with him twelve cases of books and his thesis. Some of his books and the manuscript were seized at the frontier by the German police, and when he reached Berlin he was informed he would have to translate his Czech manuscript into German for the consideration of the authorities. In view of the fact that he had brought it with him to translate into French Beneš was not inclined to waste time over German, and he refused to humour official unreasonableness. In the end the manuscript was returned to him as well as some of the books about Socialism which had been seized at the frontier.

Hanna Vlček and Anna Olič had also gone to Berlin and remained there as long as young Beneš. All three were enrolled as students at the University of Berlin.

Beneš was disturbed by Berlin.

"The military parades, which were arranged in the summer of 1908 and at which I was present, overwhelmed me. The development of industry and railways, of the Prussian military and naval strength,

compared with what I had seen at Paris and London in this respect, the mechanization of all public life under the influence of Prussian discipline, the atmosphere of constraint and the prevailing influence and authority of the military, aristocratic, and bureaucratic class, affected me painfully. . . . I felt instinctively that it must end disastrously, and the effect which it produced upon me as a member of a small and neighbouring nation was a disturbing one. . . .

"Thus I reached the study of Pan-Germanism, its theory and practice. . . . I wondered what were the effects of the propaganda carried on by Rohrbach's group, which in hundreds of thousands of leaflets, booklets, and pamphlets popularized the Berlin - Baghdad scheme and demanded not only the development of the fleet, but also a large supply of aircraft. In the pamphlets issued by Counsellor Martin during 1908 it was shown, for example, by diagrams, how, when, and within what time a German air fleet could land hundreds of thousands of troops near London. . . . These matters both bewildered and provoked me, compelling me to reflect upon the political future of Germany, to make careful comparisons with what I had seen in England and France, and to occupy myself with the problems of war."¹

About this date people were excited because a balloon managed to reach Paris from London in six hours, and these plans for German aerial aggression sounded like silly fantasies. What Beneš realized was that, whether the Germans had any chance of doing what they dreamed of doing with aeroplanes, the state of mind which conjured up such dreams was a menace to the peace of the world.

Beneš had planned to visit Russia after Berlin, but he was held up by passport difficulties until it was too late to go unless he was prepared to run the risk of perpetual banishment from Austria for evading military service, it being now time for him to return to Prague and submit himself. So instead of going to Russia he went to Dijon and defended his thesis successfully, after which he was awarded his degree as a Doctor of Laws of the University, and when he returned to Prague on September 8th, 1908, he returned as Dr Beneš.

The authorities at the Charles University refused to recognize the Dijon doctorate, and—what was more annoying—refused to let him submit a thesis for his Prague doctorate unless he put in a year's work reading for it.

It would be hardly fair to denounce the academic authorities at Prague as a lot of unsympathetic pedants. There was something to be said for their point of view. A student after spending a year at the

¹ *My War Memoirs.*

Charles University had calmly gone off to study at other universities for three years, and then expected to be accepted as a Doctor of Laws of Dijon and allowed to submit a thesis for the Prague Doctorate of Philosophy on a year's residence.

So Dr Beneš (he himself attached a lot of importance to that Doctorate of Laws) set to work, and in June 1909 offered to the Prague examiners his thesis on *The Origin and Evolution of Modern Political Individualism*. It was a learned performance; but more important than all the learning he lavished upon it was the conclusion he reached in the final chapter that the problem for democracy was to find the right compromise between individualism and socialism. That still remains a major problem now that the time has come to put Europe together again after the Second World War.

With his Prague Doctorate of Philosophy added to his Dijon Doctorate of Laws Dr Beneš had to look round for a job. He had renewed his acquaintanceship with Masaryk, who tried unsuccessfully to get him a post in Vienna with the library of the Reichsrat. Dr Beneš's ultimate ambition was to become a professor-in-ordinary at Prague University; but even Masaryk had been many years before he achieved that. In September 1909 Dr Beneš was accepted on the staff of the Commercial Academy of Prague as a teacher of French and Economics. On December 10th of that year he married Hanna Vlček. He was twenty-five years old.

As an example of industry and stamina and urgent optimism the achievement of that young Bohemian in four years is formidable. He had perfected himself in French and German. He had improved his English, and he had learned Russian and Italian. He had met many people in three capitals and discussed with them the political problems of the day. He had written about five hundred articles in Czech newspapers and reviews, and many more in French reviews. He had translated Bernard Shaw's study of Fabianism and De Volnay's *Ruines*. He had written two long theses and won two Doctor's degrees.

A year after young Edvard Beneš had reached Paris with thirty francs in his pocket, southward over the hills of Bohemia and not much farther away than 120 miles from Kožlány an insignificant youth of seventeen with dark lank hair and self-pitying eyes arrived in Vienna with the equivalent of sixty francs in his pocket and a roll of drawings under his arm. He had dreamed himself into the notion that he was an artist. The authorities at the Akademie to whom he submitted his drawings told him he might learn to be an architect's draughtsman. The

youth who had left his mother dying of cancer in his native town of Braunau was too vain to return home, and Adolf Hitler set out to earn a living by mixing concrete and painting drain-pipes, an ill-educated, self-absorbed, resentful lout. Two things in common they had, those protagonists of the European tragedy: neither of them touched alcohol or tobacco.

CHAPTER V

THIS is how Dr Beneš sums up his attitude towards Austria-Hungary when he came back to Prague:

"I returned from abroad strengthened in my original opposition to our political and social conditions. In comparison with England and France and with Western Europe in general, Austria-Hungary, disorganized by its welter of nationalities, struck me as the prototype of a reactionary, aristocratic-bureaucratic State, resembling in many respects the reactionary, militaristic, and bureaucratic character of Germany, but without its administrative and financial order, without its inner strength and influence. I had felt repelled by Germany, but the Habsburg Empire repelled me more. The traditional anti-Austrian training of a Czech had caused all those feelings to take systematic shape from my youth onwards: I was instinctively a social and national malcontent when I left home. After some time, in 1907 and 1908, believing almost fanatically in the strength and influence of democratic principles I expected that a change and regeneration would result from universal suffrage in Austria. . . .

"The long study of Socialism and social problems at home and abroad had strengthened the conviction in me that we were approaching a period when several fundamental problems concerning the structure of our society could be basically solved. The political struggle within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the fight for universal suffrage, the Bosnia annexation, the crisis of 1908, the sway of absolutism in Bohemia and Croatia, convinced me that we were passing through a time of great political crisis, which would lead either smoothly or by cataclysms to fundamental changes."¹

It is difficult to feel sure at this date whether Dr Beneš desired the freedom of his country in order to apply his theory of democracy in practice or whether he desired to see his theory of democracy advanced in order to secure the freedom of his country; and it is the nice balance of motive perceptible which makes him and Masaryk such outstanding examples of creative revolution. There is a grave danger for any national movement which allows itself to be exploited in the interest of a particular trend of political opinion; but there is a danger no less grave in concentrating too exclusively upon the single objective

¹ *My War Memoirs*, pp. 18, 19.

of independence. Ireland is an example of the latter. So was Greece a century ago. Of the former the Italy of the *Risorgimento* provides a case in point. Masaryk and Beneš achieved a feat of State-building which has been temporarily overshadowed by the events that immediately preceded and followed Munich, and there are many people who still suppose that the collapse of Czechoslovakia was inevitable and caused by some inherent weakness in its construction. How far that belief is justified can hardly be decided until we are in a position to know what lesson the discontented minorities of Czechoslovakia have learned during the macabre interlude of the Second World War.

In 1908 Dr Beneš supposed that he would require another ten years of "self-education and political preparation" before he felt himself fit to "make an attempt to enter politics." He was so determined not to spoil his studies by premature experiment that he refused two good offers from politicians to be his patrons. Dr Joseph Fořt, who was a Cabinet Minister of the Reichsrat Government, invited him to join the Young Czech Party as a political worker and suggested that this might easily lead to a comfortable position and a career. Dr Šmeral, the editor of *Právo Lidu*, to whose columns Dr Beneš was still contributing articles, proposed that he should work for the Czech Social Democratic Party and promised to look after his interests if he did. Dr Beneš was unwilling to identify himself too closely with Dr Šmeral's Marxian views, which he had never fully accepted and from which he was beginning to move farther away all the time, and he declined, although he went on writing for his paper up to the outbreak of the First World War.

Finally Dr Beneš did join Professor Masaryk's Progressive Realist Party, which was numerically small but, consisting as it did of intellectuals, exercised a considerable influence on other parties.

"I did little practical work," he writes in his *War Memoirs*, "I belonged to a kind of moderate opposition. I had always been opposed to 'diehard Realism,' which seemed to me to lack political and vital qualities, besides being rigid, doctrinaire, and sometimes petty. In its essence it was non-revolutionary and non-radical, despite the fact that it was uncompromising in the forms it assumed."

It is not surprising that Dr Beneš did little practical work for the Progressive Party. With all he had on hand it is a wonder he managed to do any work at all. He had his duties at the school where he was teaching languages and political economy. He wrote numerous articles, started a vast History of Socialism, and translated Edward Carpenter's *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*, which was published in 1910, as was the

first volume of his history. He wrote more articles and pamphlets that year. In 1911 he was still writing hard, but managed to spend two months in Paris and five months in London, whence he sent more of those letters to *Právo Lidu*—those, however, so much more appreciative of England that Goebbels did not think it useful to reprint them. In 1912 he was writing away as hard as ever and always on subjects which were strictly connected with his plan to attempt to enter political life in the year 1918. There is no evidence on the printed page that he ever wrote a word to amuse himself. The nearest approach to frivolity is a translation of Zola's *L'Assommoir*, which was published when he was twenty-one; and no doubt that was undertaken as a kind of coloured illustration to some statistical indictment he was contemplating against alcoholism as a social problem.

In that same year, 1912, he took part in a Congress of Progressive Youth at Pilsen, which produced from his pen a study of the relationship between youth and age in politics.

The year 1913 found him accepted as a *docent* of the University of Prague, the first step towards the realization of his ambition to become one day a professor-in-ordinary. He was to lecture on sociology, and that meant research and ever fresh research.

"My work as a lecturer completed my philosophical development," he would write.¹ "Hacking my way through, so to speak, to settled views (Masaryk and his books helped me more than others), I gradually began to make those views hold good in metaphysics, ethics, psychology, and sociology. In the course of the war I transferred them from theory to practical politics. I always consciously practised politics in a scientific spirit. . . . All these problems made me aware of the discrepancy between the culture and life of Western and Eastern Europe. It was a conflict with a noetic basis—the intellectualist West, the intuitivist and mystical East. I saw the two extremes clearly, and I found a conclusion as to the proper relationship between them and as to their synthesis, at which our nation in particular should aim."

As a pendant to these words at the beginning of *My War Memoirs*, it is worth while quoting these from a letter written in 1908:

"I want to chastise this attempt to set class against class, I want to demonstrate that historic materialism is a piece of nonsense . . . I want also to demonstrate that religion and other ideological phenomena are independent phenomena . . . I want to show how insensate class-hatred is, how absurd is the notion that the working-class ought not to make any alliance with the *bourgeoisie*."

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 21.

And just as his political theory moved away from Marxianism during these years just before the First World War so too did his philosophical and religious theory move away from the positivism which had satisfied him once by way of pragmatism towards "firm religious views accepting the belief in immanent teleology and in Providence as destiny."

On a June day in 1914 Dr Beneš and his wife came out of a café in Prague to make their way home to the house of the Chief of Police, where they had been living since they were married. The friendship with Anna Olič, dating back to those days in Paris nearly ten years ago, was still as cordial as ever. In the Wenceslas Square they saw the poster of a newspaper announcing the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand at Sarajevo. The now famous optimism of Dr Beneš asserted itself after the first shock. It was the end of the university term. He and Madame Beneš went off into the country for the vacation, but throughout that fatal month of July Dr Beneš was going to Prague as the crisis developed. He could not believe that Austria was set on war, and when the ultimatum to Serbia made it clear that the Dual Monarchy was bent upon its own destruction his mind was made up.

"Thus, when the war broke out," he recorded,¹ "its political meaning was, on the whole, obvious to me, while it was morally clear what I could, would, and must do. I never hesitated either for reasons of personal conviction or of practical political opportunism. From the very beginning one idea presented itself to me, and that was the consciousness of duty, the knowledge that the great moment had come when everybody who could and would accomplish something, must and would be an instrument of Providence in great and small things."

The entry of Great Britain into the war decided Dr Beneš that any faint hope of Austria's survival had vanished. To his wife and a few of his most intimate friends he declared his intention of entering upon revolutionary activity to hasten the end of the Habsburg Empire. He was in the country at the time, and a few days later went to Prague and applied for a passport. He had escaped military service in time of peace on account of that broken leg at football, but he doubted if that would prevent his being called up ultimately in the emergency of war. It might be necessary to get out of Austria in a hurry, especially if he was involved in revolutionary activity. Moreover, he felt he should like "to see what was going on abroad." He spent the rest of that feverish August of 1914 himself in a fever.

Finally, on September 10th, he made up his mind to join the staff of *Čas* (*The Time*), the organ of the Realist Progressive Party, and

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 22.

wrote for it as an unpaid contributor. It was his one way of cleansing his mind of the "repugnance and shame" with which the "fulsome approval of the mobilization" being voiced by most of the Czech papers filled him. Professor Masaryk at the same time was advising the German Jews in Prague to moderate their Austrophile enthusiasm lest the people of Prague should wreck their newspaper offices. Masaryk was anxious that no anti-Semitic agitation should prejudice feeling abroad against the Czechs. Dr Beneš, during the German advance on Paris, was rallying all his optimism to believe that the spirit of France would be too strong for the invaders; but the nervous strain was playing upon him. He could not stand the thought of inaction any longer, and in this mood he went to visit Professor Masaryk before the regular conference of the editorial staff of *Čas*.

"He was restless and wanted to get to work," Masaryk wrote in his great book, *The Making of a State*.¹ "I said: 'Good, I am at it already.' On the way to the office I confided in him and we agreed at once. I can remember the scene as we reached the top of the steps that lead down to the Elizabeth Bridge. I stopped, leant against the wooden railing and mused over the view of Prague, thoughts of our future passing through my mind . . . and of money, for money would be the sinews of political war. Dr Beneš reckoned up his resources and promised at once several thousand crowns."

And of that momentous meeting Dr Beneš has written:

"The end of our long conversation . . . which took place on that pleasant autumn day on the slope of Letná with its delightful view of the whole beauty of Prague was that Professor Masaryk informed me that . . . we should work together."

And with what accord they did work together! "Work with him was easy and efficient," Masaryk recorded. "There was little need to talk. Politically and historically he was so well trained that a word was enough . . . he had great initiative and was an untiring worker. For both of us it was good that we had led what is called a 'hard life'. . . . There was no misunderstanding between us during my whole stay abroad, and our co-operation was exemplary . . . clear heads, knowledge, firm wills, fearlessness of death give giant strength."

¹ Allen and Unwin, 1927.

CHAPTER VI

It must not be supposed that throughout Bohemia and Moravia the outbreak of war found the Czech nation united in demanding its freedom. Among the soldiers called to the Austrian colours there was resentment at having to march against Russia; but it was a sullen resentment, and there were comparatively few instances of military orders being disobeyed. The slightest insubordination was severely punished. Czechs in Russia, France, and Great Britain were accorded the privilege of being treated as Allied nationals before the end of 1914. So far as hopes of independence were cherished by the majority of Czech politicians they were based almost exclusively on the defeat of the forces of the Dual Monarchy by the Russian campaign in Galicia. To the politicians of Prague the war presented itself as only another chapter in the long history of the struggle between the Teuton and the Slav. Masaryk realized that the cause of the war lay deeper, that it was, in fact, nothing less than a struggle between what he called democracy and theocracy. It may be suggested that his use of the word 'theocracy' is misleading and, indeed, due to the predominance in his mind of the long partnership between Vienna and the Vatican, and to his own Protestantism. The minor tyranny of Calvinism in Geneva and the seventeenth-century ambition of Scottish Presbyterianism inspired by it were just as theocratic as the Holy Roman Empire. Masaryk's antithesis involves him in having to present Prussian Imperialism and Russian absolutism as theocratic, which can only be argued paradoxically. Surely the struggle is one between democracy and oligocracy. Is *vox populi vox Dei*, or does the voice of God speak with the voice of the privileged minority? Is the Divine political purpose discernible in the gradual raising of the moral, intellectual, and economic status of the multitude, or is it discernible in approval of inequalities on earth which will be adjusted in heaven? It is permissible to guess that if Masaryk had lived to see the second phase of the mundane struggle through which we have just passed he would have abandoned 'theocracy' as a description of the *Führerprinzip*.

However, the point is that, whatever his phraseology, Masaryk did apprehend the fundamental evolutionary struggle of which the First World War was the outward sign and which is much more obvious

to us who have lived to endure the Second World War. Masaryk recognized that if the ancient Kingdom of Bohemia was to be restored it could not survive such a restoration indefinitely if it were to be restored merely as a Slav bastion against the Teutonic *Drang nach Osten*. It must protect something larger than Slavdom: it must be a bastion of Democracy. To achieve that the West must be made aware of the importance of Czechoslovakia to Europe. It is not premature to speak of it thus, because in that autumn of 1914 before he left Prague Masaryk, himself a Slovak from Moravia, told Dr Beneš that if Austro-Hungary were defeated they would have a Czech national State, but that if Germany were also crushed they would obtain a State with historical frontiers and including Slovakia.

It is clear that what led Masaryk to take that little man thirty-four years younger than himself so much more completely into his confidence than any of what might have been supposed to be more experienced politicians was that younger man's immediate grasp of the larger issues involved in winning freedom for the Czechs. Dr Beneš was not interested in planning a Kingdom of Bohemia for some Russian Grand Duke with its inevitable concomitant of "mistresses and champagne," as Masaryk said, though in those early days they did wonder if the Duke of Connaught might not be persuaded to accept it: Venizelos had the same idea for Greece at one time. However, such a suggestion was no more than a counter to play against the Czech Russophiles who were already discussing the entry of the Russian troops into Prague.

"Masaryk," Dr Beneš records,¹ "was aware of the alarm in Western Europe with regard to the expansion of Russia, and he was therefore cautious about all those political plans in which Russia was involved."

Dr Beneš himself was annoyed by the attitude of the Prague socialists. With unusual vehemence for him he writes:²

What exasperated me was the policy of the Social Democratic Party (with which I was closely connected), by reason of its intolerable opportunism, the absolutely inexplicable abandonment of its principles, and its attempt to justify by means of Marxist phrases.

This might serve as a comment on the attitude of the Communist Party in Great Britain at the beginning of the Second World War, although no doubt the reasons prompting it were different.

Dr B. Šmeral, the editor of *Právo Lidu*, told Dr Beneš that Masaryk was leading the nation to another "White Mountain" and that a

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 40.

² *My War Memoirs*, p. 30.

responsible politician ought not to engage in such a gambling policy. He challenged him to quote a single utterance to make it evident that the Entente was seriously concerned with the Czech cause.

Dr Beneš considered Dr Šmeral's remark a "startling proof of the aberration of many Czechs before the war—and what was much worse—also during the war. It was a proof of the erroneous tactics and development of ideas among the Czechoslovak Social Democrats, as well as of Dr Šmeral's sterility of mind, Marxist doctrinairism, and of course political incapacity. . . . He was a decisive personality in the Czech camp, and there were not many who were his equal. But what I felt then and what I feel to-day is this: How gross was the ignorance of conditions, how defective the philosophical and political training in our ranks!"

If Dr Beneš decides to extend his memoirs he might continue to make that reflection at intervals throughout, for the final failure of the statesmen of the interval between the two great wars has been their gross ignorance of conditions and their defective philosophical and political training.

Masaryk left Prague for Italy on December 18th, 1914, with the intention of returning by Geneva about February 1st: it was the start of the most remarkable Odyssey ever undertaken by a university professor in his sixty-fifth year. The richness of Masaryk's personality, the wisdom and humility and warmth of heart of that dauntless Slovak, the treasure of his varied culture, his magnanimity and agelessness and poetic force have made so deep a mark upon his period that the little man whom he left behind in Prague authorized "to direct the work and keep in touch with him" and whom ultimately, his task accomplished, he was to leave behind on earth to face the ruin of his work and preserve the faith and courage to rebuild it has not even yet been fully appreciated—except, let it be added, by Masaryk himself. "I can tell you," he said to Karel Čapek,¹ "that without Beneš we should not have had our Republic."

It may be remembered that Dr Beneš had been a fast and elusive outside left on the football field. The master at the Commercial Academy and the university lecturer now applied those qualities of speed and elusiveness to secret service. He started modestly by making journeys to Dresden to bring back to Prague foreign newspapers still allowed into Germany but not into Austria. Then he collected the material supplied to Masaryk by Kovanda, the valet of Heinold, the Minister of the Interior, invaluable material which enabled the conspirators to

¹ *President Masaryk tells His Story* (Allen and Unwin, 1941), p. 244.

anticipate moves by him and the Prime Minister and the Governor-General of Bohemia over a considerable period.¹

On January 15th Masaryk reached Switzerland, and Dr Beneš was alarmed to receive from Kovanda the copy of a telegram from the Austrian Embassy in Rome informing the Minister of the Interior that Masaryk was expected to return to Bohemia in a few days. Dr Beneš telegraphed in code to Geneva urging Masaryk to stay where he was as the situation was dangerous; but, worried by the thought that Masaryk might not receive the message, he decided to go to Switzerland himself.

The passport Dr Beneš had obtained at the outbreak of war was no longer valid because it had no photograph.¹ On top of that he had been called up for the second levy and was therefore militarily ineligible for a journey abroad. However, he got hold of an identity book through an old school-friend in the police, and with that and his old passport set out to Munich.

After many difficulties on the frontiers he managed to reach the Hotel Victoria in Zürich and meet Masaryk. It was at this meeting that Dr Beneš was directed by Masaryk to get in touch with Dr Kramář, who was still in Prague and was afterwards to become the first Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia.

Masaryk said that he had made up his mind to remain abroad throughout the war and begin a struggle against Austria "with a full acceptance of the personal and political consequences to himself." He aimed at organizing the "Czech political *émigrés* who, in concert with the politicians at home, would take open and responsible action against Austria-Hungary." Beneš was to announce this to the political circles with whom Masaryk had been in touch before he left Prague, and he was to obtain "either their tacit or open consent." Furthermore, Masaryk insisted upon the need to raise money. Other political *émigrés*, the Poles in particular, were well supplied with funds. He suggested getting in touch with Dr Scheiner, Chairman of the Sokol¹ Organization, for a contribution.

¹ I will take advantage of a footnote to affirm that tapping the flow of such a source of information over a long time is a nervous strain of which those who have not had to do it have little conception. For six months in 1916 I did it myself with an employee at the German Legation in Athens, and while the results went far to paralyse German espionage the strain of collecting the material and keeping the source from being compromised nearly paralysed me.

² The British did not insist on photographs for passports until half-way through 1916!

³ The Sokols (Falcons) began as a gymnastic society in 1862 and had developed into a national movement which remained the backbone of the nation.

Finally Masaryk told Dr Beneš to form a secret committee for the political workers against Austria, and this was the origin of the famous "Maffia."

At the Austrian Consulate in Zürich Dr Beneš's passport was taken from him "after an unpleasant scene," and he was given a new one which only entitled him to return to Prague and then lapsed. Dr Beneš reached Prague in the middle of February at the moment when the Russian forces were closing in on Cracow. Dr Kramář, confident of a speedy Russian victory, declined Masaryk's suggestion that he should come abroad. He was convinced that the future independent Czech State would require a close political and constitutional relationship with Russia and was convinced his presence was necessary in Prague "to direct matters in a fitting manner" when the Russians arrived. Dr Beneš, after his meeting with Masaryk, was "bewildered" by Dr Kramář's confidence, but he deferred to the older man and established politician and did not argue with him. It is interesting to compare Dr Beneš's distrust of Tsarist Russia's potentiality with his faith in Soviet Russia's potentiality. In both cases he has been proved right.

For the next few months the plotting in Prague was in the best tradition of romance. False sides to trunks. Postcards split in half by Dr Beneš himself and put together again by a bookbinder. Coding and decoding messages in which he had the help not only of Madame Beneš but also of their friend Miss Olič, in whose father's house they were living. All the conspirators had aliases, and it is typical of Dr Beneš's abounding energy that he should have required half a dozen—Spolný, Bělský, Berger, Novotný, König, and Šícha. The other conspirators had one apiece. The Secret Service is as much dependent as an army upon its communications.

Dr Beneš relates one story of the revolutionary couriers which deserves quotation at length:

"There were some interesting incidents in connexion with the courier named Beneš, who went under the name of Frič. He was an enthusiastic Czech patriot, seventy years of age, who had served as a volunteer in the Franco-Prussian war. By a misunderstanding he had been sent in the first week of June with a message to Dr Rašín. This message was hidden in a short English pipe, but Dr Rašín, not having been informed beforehand that the courier was coming, was alarmed. He thought that it was a trick on the part of the Austrian police and in the presence of the courier he threw the pipe into the fire. Old Beneš, who himself was very much scared, went away without leaving any address and thinking that he had been discovered. With the help

of Hájek and Hajšman, however, who obtained the details from Dr Rašín, he was run to earth in Prague and invited to a meeting. Hajšman discovered him and, in accordance with a prearranged plan, brought him to Václavské Square, where he handed him over to Hájek. The latter informed him that he was to meet Spolný and took him to Charles Square, round by the New Town prison. These proceedings struck old Beneš as being suspicious. He knew the name of Dr Beneš, but he did not know that the name which he had assumed as a revolutionary was Spolný. He told Hájek that he knew Charles Square and also that there was a prison in the neighbourhood. Then, being suddenly filled with suspicion that he was being taken to prison, he refused to go and meet Spolný. Finally, after an animated scene, Hájek succeeded in inducing Beneš (the courier) to accompany him. At Žitná Street Hájek passed old Beneš on to me. He was still full of mistrust and was totally unable to make out what we were up to. We acted in this way because we feared that Beneš might be followed by the police. I told him my name. Old Beneš then perceived that after his queer adventure he had found the man he was searching for and that he could fulfil that patriotic task which Masaryk had entrusted to him. With tears in his eyes he assured me how happy he was to see me and to know that Benešes never betray the nation."

Funds for all these activities were less easy to find than men and women. Dr Beneš observes drily, "The negotiations for financial support do not make an edifying story."

He himself had given Professor Masaryk all he could from money he borrowed from his wife's well-to-do aunt. Dr Scheiner had done his best to secure help from the Sokol funds, but that was a restricted source. Dr Šámal had contributed substantially from his own means. Irritated by the shortage of money Dr Beneš decided to collect from a wider circle of presumable sympathizers with the revolutionary aims:

"I very soon dropped this idea, for at the very first attempt I saw how useless it was. I applied to two prominent party men, both of whom were known to be extremely well off. One of them, after a long conversation, slipped 100 crowns into my hand one evening, and the second, a few days later, while we were in a café together, discoursed to me at great length about his upright conscience and his views of these matters, whereupon he gave me nothing."¹

Finally it was resolved to seek funds from patriotic Czechs in the still neutral United States, and Vojta Beneš was entrusted with the job. Dr Beneš's brother was granted a passport for himself and his family,

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 52.

the reason he gave for his journey bewitching the authorities: it was to investigate the manufacture of artificial limbs for disabled soldiers. Vojta Beneš got away from Prague in July 1915 and accomplished all the duties entrusted to him by the "Maffia" and by Masaryk, including the collection of funds.

Dr Beneš's philosophic curiosity led him to speculate on the reasons why it was so difficult for him to extract money from people ready to shout at political meetings: "To the last man and the last farthing." He came to the conclusion that the determining factor was "not so much the financial sacrifice involved but, in the majority of cases, the fear of being discovered by the police." This conclusion is typical of Dr Beneš. He would rather believe that human nature is more often cowardly than that it is more often mean. Cowardice could just be excused as a physical failure: for the moral failure of meanness his own magnanimity could have found no excuse.

While Dr Beneš was plotting a revolution and occupying himself with the espionage and counter-espionage of a conspiracy he was lecturing at the university, conducting his classes at the Commercial Academy, and, of course, writing articles. His lectures were on the philosophy of war, and his pupils were inoculated with the idea that one aspect of war's philosophy is the opportunity it brings for a nation in subjection to regain its freedom. Similar lectures were going on in Ireland at the beginning of 1915, though not such academic ones. One of Dr Beneš's lectures, in which he openly declared the Czech nation must start a revolution, was published in *Lumir*.

At the end of March Professor Masaryk asked Dr Beneš to visit him again in Switzerland, and Beneš planned to spend the Easter vacation there. He had a good deal of difficulty in getting another passport, and might not have succeeded but for the fact that he was living in the house of Counsellor Olič, and ex-Chief Commissioner of Police. When asked by the authorities why he wanted to go to Switzerland he had what one must call the impudence to reply that he took an academic interest in war and wanted to prosecute some investigations in Switzerland for scholastic purposes. The police had failed to notice that Dr Beneš was displaying an academic interest in revolution, and he was granted a passport.

The meeting with Professor Masaryk at Geneva was fruitful. Arrangements were made to publish a political paper in French for the allied public to be called *La Nation Tchèque* under the editorship of Professor Denis and another paper for the Czechs abroad under the editorship of Dr Sychrava. Much of the material for the early numbers of both

papers was supplied to their own bewilderment by the Austrian Ministry of the Interior, which Dr Beneš was still tapping through Kovanda.

Masaryk was anxious to come out into the open as soon as possible and declare Czech opposition to Austria-Hungary, and he was disappointed that so few political helpers from Prague had joined him. He was irritated by such caution, and urged Dr Beneš to impress on people at home the necessity of taking public action without relying on the Allies, particularly Russia. Masaryk was anxious that the Russophiles should appreciate how little they could expect from Russian help and urged the advisability of Dr Kramář's going to Russia himself.

Finally Masaryk gave Beneš the text of the manifesto with which he intended to open the struggle against Austria and Hungary. He wanted this approved and amended by the "Maffia," who were to send him word by the next courier from Prague. If the people at home did not agree to take open revolutionary action and give him their support he proposed to wait a while and then take action on his own account.

On his way home, having outstayed the Easter vacation by a week, Dr Beneš visited Dr Sychrava at Zürich.

"He was one of the first who, to his own detriment, threw himself into the struggle. Everything he did revealed his integrity, his devotion to our cause, his unselfishness and his modesty."¹

At Zürich questions of propaganda were discussed, and Dr Beneš slipped the notes he took into the heels of his boots. The notes of his discussion with Masaryk had been sown into his coat collar at Geneva by Olga Masaryk. Then he bought a number of books about the war and started off for home.

"At that time journeys to and from foreign countries involved considerable risks. The first thorough examination took place at Buchs and the second at Feldkirch. Besides that, however, all along the Tyrolese line military and police patrols were continually passing through the railway carriages and examining the travellers. I simply left matters to chance.

"Beyond Arlberg one of these examinations took place in my compartment. I had several questionable books, and in order to hide this fact I had also bought anti-Entente books as well as German and Austro-Hungarian propagandist literature. Having twice escaped detection and seeing that the decisive moment had again arrived, I decided to tempt fate for the third time. I made a parcel of all my books and on the top of it I put a copy of *Simplizissimus* and the *Inter-*

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 59.

nationale Wochenschrift, together with a few German books. When the officials who were carrying out the inspection arrived and asked me what I had, I showed them the parcel and told them to look for themselves. One of the officials lifted up the copy of *Simplizissimus*, looked at the title of the two German books, examined one of them to see whether it contained any loose papers, and then passed on.

"But I had no further desire thus to tempt fate. I therefore packed the books up, waited for a favourable moment, and put them into the next carriage into the lavatory with the railwaymen's belongings. They remained there during the new examination which took place before Salzburg, and when we had entered Austria I took the bundle out again. These and similar moments, many of which fell to my lot during the war, strengthened my nerves and helped me to cultivate presence of mind."

In Vienna Dr Beneš paid a call on Hlaváč, the correspondent there of *Čas*, in order to persuade him that Masaryk's policy was right. Dr Beneš spent three hours walking round the Imperial Castle with him while he explained why every Czech worthy of the name must identify himself with the revolutionary movement. Hlaváč refused to float upon the Danube of Dr Beneš's eloquence, and remained convinced that Germany and Austria would win the war. Nor, back in Prague, was Dr Beneš able to counteract Dr Kramář's conviction that Russia would be triumphant in spite of the Carpathian reverses and that Vienna would appeal to him to save Austria from catastrophe. However, when Dr Kramář agreed to take the preliminary steps for going abroad a passport was refused him.

The passport problem was becoming acute, but at last Dr Beneš managed to get hold of some empty passports from the local office and to buy some old foreign ones (mostly Bulgarian). Various helpers, but nothing like so many as were wanted, were got out of Austria by these passports. One of them made out in the name of Miroslav Šícha, a traveller in optical instruments, was offered to Dr Borský so that he could escape abroad and avoid military service. Dr Beneš obtained the Swiss visa himself and obtained a German visa by removing it from the passport of the real Miroslav Šícha. Dr Borský looked at the passport and declined it. He thought military service would be less dangerous than trying to cross the frontier with such an obviously faked passport. So Dr Beneš stuck his own photograph on it and put it by in case of need.

And that was not far away. Masaryk went to Paris and London in April 1915. The first number of *La Nation Tchèque* appeared on May 1st

and twenty copies of it reached Prague in a new variety of trunk, "an admirable piece of work with hollow sides." In this trunk was a variety of other inflammable material including a report from Dr Sychrava about the progress of the Czech Brigade that was being formed in Russia from prisoners of war. On the evening of May 20th Dr Beneš arrived at Dr Šámal's house for a meeting of the "Maffia," bringing with him "the whole collection of trophies." Suddenly the telephone bell rang, and Dr Scheiner was given a message from the Sokols to warn him that soldiers were searching his house. The meeting broke up in perturbation. That night Dr Kramář was arrested and the copy of *La Nation Tchèque* Dr Beneš had just given him was taken away to be used later as evidence against him. Dr Scheiner was also arrested and removed to Vienna. Thanks to the information coming in from the Ministry of the Interior it was established that the arrests were by order of the military and had nothing to do with the "Maffia."

After the removal of Dr Scheiner it was Dr Alois Rašín, who was to become the first Czechoslovak Minister of Finance, on whom Dr Beneš relied. "He was hard-working, courageous, undaunted, loyal, and devoted. We had no difficulty in agreeing as to the direction which Masaryk's policy should take."

On July 12th, 1915, Dr Rašín was arrested, and later both he and Dr Kramář were sentenced to death, but a reprieve was granted and they were sentenced to long terms of hard labour. Masaryk came back to Switzerland from Paris and London and sent gloomy news about Russia. "They had no political plan, there was disorder and obvious treachery in their army, chaos in their administration, and they were completely indifferent to our cause." The Russian Ambassador in London had never seen a racial map of Austria-Hungary till Masaryk showed him one, and the Allied Ministers were just as ignorant and equally devoid of any political plan.

Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose close on thirty years later.

Dr Beneš did not tell the "Maffia" all that Masaryk and Sychrava had communicated to him; he was anxious not to discourage them. By August news of his brother Vojta's activities in America had reached Vienna, and Dr Beneš himself was placed under police supervision. He decided that the time had come for him to escape from Austria. The first plan was for him to make his way across Hungary, Transylvania, and Rumania to Russia. On the Rumanian frontier he was to be helped by a Transylvanian priest who had already effected several escapes for political fugitives. At the end of August Dr Beneš left his summer residence for Prague with the intention of making for Hungary;

but at the last moment he changed his plan, and, having found that an old school-friend was stationed with the military garrison at Asch, he asked him to smuggle him across the frontier into Bavaria, for he thought that his false Austrian passport might be less apparent to the German authorities. So on September 1st, 1915, Dr Amerling with some difficulty got Mr Miroslav Šícha, the commercial traveller, over the frontier on the road to Hof, whence he took the train to Munich, and from there to Lake Constance. There was a long and nerve-racking interrogation by German soldiers before the traveller in optician's instruments was allowed to board the boat on Lake Constance for Rohrschach, in Switzerland, but on September 3rd he set foot on Swiss soil, and at nine o'clock of a rain-soaked evening he met Masaryk in Geneva at the restaurant *Des Eaux Vives*. When the Czech leader saw the preposterous passport of Miroslav Šícha, declined by the prudent Dr Borský, he scolded his young lieutenant for his recklessness. That journey from Prague was his last during the war.

The spirit in which Dr Beneš made that hazardous journey breathes from this paragraph:

"I had slipped away from home with only a small handbag, which my wife had hidden under her cape when she had accompanied me to the railway station at our summer quarters. I had promised her that I would return within two years at the most, and I told her to be prepared for hard times, as she would be harassed, cross-examined, and perhaps even imprisoned by the police. I advised her what attitude she was to adopt and what answers she was to give. Should things become unbearable she was to repudiate me. We were ready for whatever might befall. Every great and righteous cause demands sacrifices, and they must be made resolutely, without sentimentality. And every sacrifice thus made will cost one's opponents very dear. Such were my feelings when I took my seat in the train bound for Cheb and bade farewell to those who were dear to me.

"It was not long before my wife and the others who were implicated in the plot were arrested and imprisoned in Vienna, as we had expected."

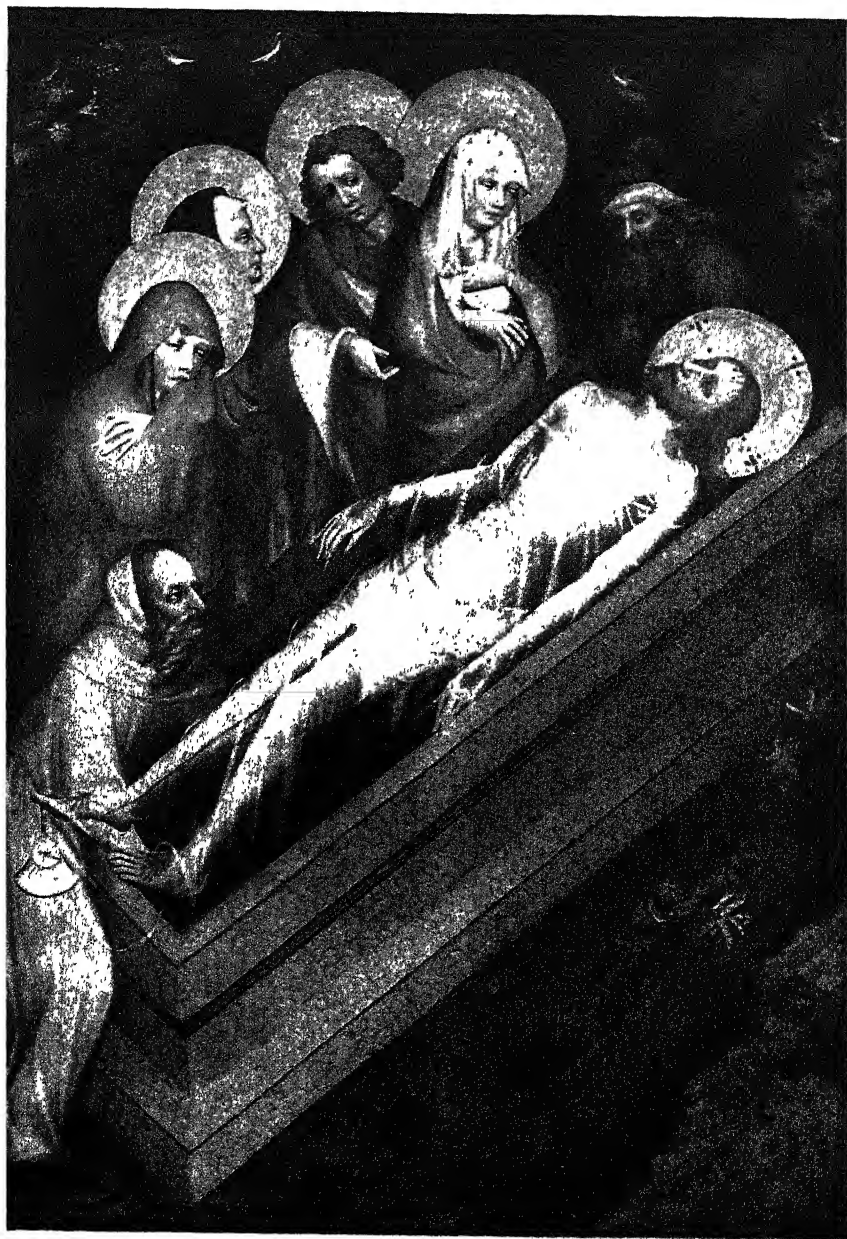
Dr Beneš did not see his wife again until January 1st, 1919, when for the first time he was able to hear the details of what had befallen her and other friends after he left Prague.

At first Masaryk was inclined to be rather annoyed that his lieutenant had escaped. He asked who was going to take his place in the "Maffia" and maintain communications between Prague and Switzerland. He declared the Beneš ought to return and make some satisfactory

arrangements before he made his final departure. Dr Beneš said he would go back if Masaryk wanted but that *gendarmérie* reports which had come into his hands indicated that he would certainly find himself in prison if he did.

By the following afternoon Masaryk had a new plan of campaign. Beneš would go to Paris. Sychrava would remain in Switzerland. He himself would go to London.

Dr Beneš's activities as a conspirator are important because they illuminate an aspect of his character which is apt to be forgotten. We hear so much about his literary labours, his fanatical capacity for absorbing information, and his agility and patience as a negotiator that there is a tendency to look upon him as a kind of highly perfected clerical machine. It is well to remember those journeys in and out of Germany with prohibited newspapers, and in and out of Switzerland with incriminating documents and prohibited books. Journeys like that, when nothing stood between him and being put up against a wall except a faked passport, demanded not only courage and resolution of the highest order but also exceptional nervous stamina. Sneaking about the world in the great struggle of the people, Hitler called these activities, and contrasted his own duty as a decent German soldier with such activities. What song the Sirens sang and what Hitler did in the First World War are comparable mysteries. All we know about his martial activity is that he awarded himself the Iron Cross for a mythical exploit and that he did the washing for the officers of his regiment. Hitler would have been as capable of carrying through what Dr Beneš carried through in 1915 as Sir Andrew Aguecheek.



ENTOMBMENT

Panel from the Altar-piece by the Master of Třeboň.
Second half of the fourteenth century.
State Gallery, Prague



MADONNA AND CHILD

Surrounded by the Joys of Mary.

Unknown Czech master, early fifteenth century.

Buckingham Palace

By gracious permission of His Majesty the King

CHAPTER VII

ALMOST exactly ten years after he came to Paris as a student Dr Beneš went back there as Masaryk's representative to work in France. He was now a student for a degree in the great world of politics and approached his task with the same ascetic and industrious determination as the academic task of a decade earlier. "My beginnings in Paris were difficult," he says of that September 1915.

The little man found a lodging in a small room on the fifth floor of a house in the Rue Leopold Robert, for which he paid 120 francs a month. He had lunch and supper for one and a half francs in a small restaurant in the same street. He prepared his own breakfast. It was *vie de Bohème* all over again.

"The few acquaintances which I had made in France during my first and second stay there (1905-8 and 1911) had either forgotten me or else had disappeared in consequence of the war. I was not in touch with official circles, and in accordance with the principles which we practised throughout the war I made no attempt to secure an entry into those circles at this early stage of our affairs; for we did not want to start any negotiations until our position was sufficiently strong."

However, within a fortnight Dr Beneš had got in touch with Professor L. Eisenmann, who had been at Dijon when he was studying there and, as the author of a standard work on Austria-Hungary, had been interested by the thesis young Beneš had submitted for his Doctorate. Eisenmann was working with the French War Ministry as an expert on Austro-Hungarian affairs, and Dr Beneš arranged to provide him with news and comments from Prague. By October 16th Dr Beneš, who had been contributing regularly to French Socialist papers for some years, was in touch with the personal secretary of Albert Thomas at the Ministry of Munitions. Then he was invited by a Czech Socialist society to give a lecture on Austria and persuaded an old acquaintance, Paul Louis, who was one of the foreign editors of the *Petit Parisien*, to share the platform with him. This led to an introduction to an important official at the Foreign Ministry. Another old friend, Strimpl the painter, afterwards Czechoslovak Minister at Brussels, introduced him to a journalist called Quirielle, who in turn introduced him to Auguste Gauvain, the foreign editor of the *Journal des Débats*. Gauvain was a supporter of the movement for Czech independence

from the first. His position on the staff of the Catholic and Conservative *Journal des Débats* much enhanced the significance of this support, and Gauvain himself, a lucid and far-sighted journalist, was of the greatest help in presenting the Czech case throughout the war.

Upon these slight foundations Dr Beneš began to erect that beautifully balanced edifice of propaganda for the cause into which he had thrown his mind, his heart, and all his material resources. Paris was the perfect milieu to give his qualities full play: Masaryk was ideally suited to get the best out of London and equally capable of making an impression on the United States and Russia. At that date Dr Beneš might have missed the mark in London. That feverishly busy little man of thirty-one would have seemed so ridiculously young there to represent an oppressed nation.

However, neither Masaryk in London nor Beneš in Paris could hope to create a revolution and place a country back upon the map of Europe merely by their own industry and a philosophical approach to history. It was essential that the Czechs at home and abroad should make some display of corporate action. It was decided to draw up a manifesto to which the colonies of Czechs in America, Russia, London, and Paris would be invited to endorse by means of representative signatures. This caused the usual jealousies, and Dr Beneš set his compatriots "an example of political reserve" by not pushing his own name forward. A "Czechoslovak Foreign Committee" to provide signatures for the manifesto on behalf of the colonies and regional associations was constituted, and after a little more arguing about signatures a proclamation of the Czechoslovak Foreign Committee officially declared war upon Austria-Hungary.

The date of this proclamation was Sunday, November 14th, 1915, and it was published in France, Russia, Switzerland, and the United States.

The moment did not suggest that the Czech colonists were opportunists: their action had more of the spirit of contemporary Greece than of contemporary Turkey about it. Serbia had been overrun. The Russian armies were in full retreat. The Dardanelles Expedition had failed. The prospect for the Allies was overcast and sombre.

Dr Beneš admits that the effect of this manifesto was not considerable. Although it proclaimed that the cause of Vienna and Budapest was already lost, that the downfall of the Habsburg Empire was certain, and that an independent Czechoslovak state was inevitable, the Central Powers did not trouble, and, indeed, the only Allied journalist who reported the manifesto at any length was Gauvain in the *Journal des*

Débats. Nevertheless, as Dr Beneš says, "it was the first decisive measure, open and deliberate, undertaken in agreement with the politicians at home and therefore fraught with responsibility to the nation and its future. There could now be no turning back."

Dr Beneš went presently to London to consult Masaryk about plans. Masaryk had just delivered his inaugural lecture as Professor of Slavonic Studies at King's College, London, an appointment he had received through the efforts of Dr Seton-Watson, and that great crusader, scholar, and philhellene Ronald Burrows. Lord Robert Cecil had taken the chair and Mr Asquith had sent a message affirming that the Allies were waging war for the protection of small nations. After consultations with Masaryk, Dr Beneš went to Switzerland, where he saw Josef Dürich, a deputy of the Czech Agrarian Party, who had been nominated by Dr Kramář as a suitable representative in Russia.

On December 13th, the day after he returned to Paris from Geneva, Dr Beneš had a meeting which was to bear more precious fruit for Czechoslovakia.

Dr Milan Štefánik was the son of a poor Slovak pastor who had come to France to study astronomy. He was three years older than Dr Beneš, who had met him first just ten years earlier. Since then he had been Secretary to the National Observatory of France, in which capacity he had gone on astronomical missions all over the world from Tahiti to Turkestan. He became naturalized as a French subject, and when war broke out he was Director of the Observatory at Meudon. He had volunteered for service with the French Air Force, in which he was now a Lieutenant, and during the Serbian retreat had crashed in Albania. Thence he had reached Rome, where he had made friends with the French Ambassador and also with Sonnino, the Italian Foreign Minister. It was Štefánik who on the outbreak of war had persuaded a French police official, a friend of his, that the Czechs, Slovaks, and other Slavs classed as Austrians should be granted the privileges of Allied nationals.

In that December of 1915 Štefánik was on the point of going into hospital for a serious internal operation, but he was full of schemes for the future and urged Beneš to visit Masaryk again in London and put them before Masaryk and persuade him to visit Paris. "We became loyal and devoted friends and fellow-workers," Dr Beneš records. "We had only one dispute, but that was not until the Peace Conference, and it was settled in a friendly manner."

Štefánik went off to hospital, and Beneš went to London, when

Masaryk agreed to come to Paris in the New Year. Beneš was asked to go to Holland and establish a branch of the Czech organization in Rotterdam. He spent a seasick Christmas Eve on the steamer, and in Rotterdam, where he was staying under the name of M. Leblanc, he aroused the suspicion of the British counter-espionage people, so that on asking for a visa back to England he was refused. However, with "great difficulty" he managed to land in England, was arrested as an Austrian spy, and detained in a London prison. Masaryk succeeded in getting him out and in January he returned to Paris. "I may mention," he observes in a note at the end of *My War Memoirs*, "that this was not the last occasion upon which I was imprisoned by the Allied authorities. The English locked me up three times—in each case only for a short period until matters were cleared up—and the French 'twice.'" It is characteristic of Dr Beneš to mention the arrests and the seasickness in the same note as minor inconveniences of war-time travel not worthy of a place in the body of his narrative.

Masaryk arrived in Paris at the end of January 1916, and Štefánik, who had emerged from hospital, secured through the influence of two of his personal friends an offer by Briand to receive the Czech leader officially.

This interview on February 4th, 1916, was crucial. Masaryk was able to enlighten the French statesman about the larger idea at the back of Czech independence. The first step to counter the spread of Pan-Germanism was the destruction of Austria-Hungary in favour of the smaller nations of Central Europe. This and this only would avail to put a brake on the German *Drang nach Osten* which was a perpetual threat to European peace. Thus and thus only could France carry to its logical conclusion the implication of the Franco-Russian Alliance, the practical value of which a failure to destroy the Habsburg Empire must ultimately invalidate. Perhaps Masaryk (though he does not say so in his account of the interview) took the opportunity to put before Briand his own misgivings about the strength of Tsarist Russia and the possible effect of a Russian revolution. Anyway, Briand was sufficiently impressed by Masaryk's argument to allow a *communiqué* to be published announcing official French support for the Czech movement, and thus committed his country to a policy with regard to Austria-Hungary which no amount of subsequent intrigue was able to upset, until it was rolled in the diplomatic gutter at Munich.

The official support of Briand made it essential to give a more official shape to what Dr Beneš calls the "casual and primitive form of the

Foreign Committee." The patriotic activities of the Czech colonists in various countries demanded the strictest co-ordination in order to prevent uncertainty of aim and confusion of purpose. It was resolved, after summoning Dürich and Sychrava from Switzerland for consultation with Masaryk, to replace the "Foreign Committee" by a new central organization independent of the often divergent views of the Czech colonists. This new organization was given the name of "Conseil National des Pays Tchèques," and it is important to note in view of later developments that it was Štefánik, a Slovak, who suggested the name. Štefánik had found it difficult enough to enlighten French ignorance about the Czechs. He was not prepared to add the Slovaks as a complication.

It was decided to establish the Secretariat-General of the National Council in Paris and give it a permanent executive function as a rallying-point for the whole of Czech activities all over the world. Such a central office would serve to impress the Allied Governments and Allied opinion with the substantial unity of the Czech movement. Masaryk became President of the National Council, Dürich was Vice-President, Štefánik was the representative of the Slovaks, and Dr Beneš was the Secretary-General. Offices were taken for the National Council at 18 Rue Bonaparte, and the Secretary-General had a lodging for himself on the premises. Of course, there was opposition to the Secretariat-General. When has a centralizing process been carried through without it? The young Secretary-General's own "situation was not always an easy one" at first; but being completely detached in his passion for getting things done as expeditiously as possible in the right way to achieve the end in view, which was the re-creation of his country and not the glorification of Edvard Beneš, he was able to "avoid conflicts." He learned to take it for granted that he would be blamed for everything that seemed to be going wrong; but provided that he himself was convinced that it was going right he was contemptuous of the personal effect upon himself. So earnestly, so passionately objective a man has always been impatient of self-indulgence.

"The National Council at Paris succeeded gradually in establishing communication with our fellow-countrymen throughout the world. They reported themselves from South America, especially Brazil and Argentine, then from South Africa, Australia, and China, and wherever possible they sent subscriptions. There were frequent cases in which our fellow-countrymen in these States spontaneously offered themselves for military service or sent contributions. As General Secretary I maintained a regular correspondence as far as possible with all organizations

in the individual countries, thus linking our people with the central organization and strengthening its authority.

"I kept up a correspondence with the League (of Czechoslovak Associations) at Kiev, and quite regularly sent news to the National Alliance in America. Our communications with Switzerland and Holland were very active, and we were in close touch, both written and personal, with Italy and England. When we succeeded in starting our movement among the prisoners of war and carrying out military plans on a large scale in France, Italy and Russia (in addition to the recruiting scheme in America) our organization reached the highest point of its development as regards unity, discipline and success. I need hardly add that I had kept in continual touch with Prague."¹

When it is realized that almost every first person plural in that quotation might more accurately have been a first person singular, a clear view is afforded of the astounding capacity for organization enjoyed by that ubiquitous and indefatigable little scholar in the thirty-third year of his fanatically industrious life.

"I had no breathing-space, except for the time spent in the restaurant at lunch and supper. This went on throughout the war except that later I obtained a somewhat better lodging, with somewhat better surroundings, on the premises occupied by the National Council in the Rue Bonaparte. But I never really had any intervals for rest, never any holidays or Sundays."

Even that breathing-space at meals shrank to nothing when Masaryk was in Paris because they "could talk during the meal and decide upon their aims, plans, and further measures."

It was at these meals in February 1916 that Masaryk and Beneš formed their decisions about action among the thousands of Czech prisoners of war in Russia, Italy, Serbia, and France.

Exactly a year before, when Beneš was still making those journeys between Prague and Switzerland, Masaryk had foreseen the vital importance to the Czech cause of an army and formulated it as follows:

"If we establish an army we shall acquire a new juridical status as regards Austria and the Allies. A further step might consist of a formal declaration of war upon Austria-Hungary. This will create a political situation enabling us to attain at least our minimum demands when peace is negotiated. . . . Without a decisive and military struggle we shall obtain nothing from anybody."

That was realistic philosophy indeed.

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 102.

By February 1916 Masaryk and Beneš were convinced that a Czech army would be more useful on the Western than on the Eastern Front. A month or two later the Russian reinforcements of 400,000 promised to France had produced only 10,000; it was becoming clear that Russia was incapable of carrying out the agreement. The commander of the Russian troops in France and the Russian Military Attaché were both much perturbed by this failure, and Dr Beneš suggested to them the possibility of transporting 40,000 of the Czech prisoners of war to the West. The two Russians were delighted, perceiving an opportunity to link them up with the Russian troops in France and thus "increasing their influence and strengthening their authority." There is no more certain way to the heart of a soldier than to suggest a possibility of increasing the numbers of men under his command. Through the two soldiers Beneš was able to win the support of the Russian Ambassador for his plan, and through him he could hope to gain the favour of the authorities in Petrograd. On the other side Beneš and Štefánik obtained from French official circles approval of their scheme.

Finally it was decided that Dürich should go to Russia in June. Neither Masaryk, Beneš, nor Štefánik thought he was the right person for the job, but he had left Prague with a warm recommendation from Dr Kramář, and it would have been unwise for the Czech leaders abroad to seem to ignore the patriots at home. Moreover, although Masaryk was sceptical of the help that Czech independence would receive from the Tsarist Government, it would have been a mistake to allow his mistrust to become too obvious. Dürich committed several *gaffes* in Paris before he left, and Štefánik had a blazing row with him, which ended in Dürich's promising to take no step independently of the National Council's line of action. So Štefánik withdrew his opposition to Dürich's journey with a stipulation that he should go to Russia himself. Beneš, a little nervous of a second row which he would not be within reach to smooth over, agreed. So did Masaryk, but with so little enthusiasm that he did not enlist the help either of Briand or the Russian diplomatic authorities to support Štefánik's application to the French military authorities for leave of absence. This infuriated Štefánik, who wanted to resign from the National Council and was with some difficulty dissuaded by Beneš from such an extreme measure. In the end Masaryk telegraphed a recommendation of his journey to Izvolsky, and Štefánik was placated.

Dürich left for Russia on June 23rd with two aides of whom Beneš thoroughly disapproved. Štefánik worked himself up into a state of feverish agitation when Dürich left because the necessary French

approval of his mission was hanging fire. He put the matter in the hands of Beneš to make his journey an official request by the National Council. Beneš obtained the formal approval of the Russian Embassy, and in his capacity as Secretary-General approached de Margerie, then the political director of the French Foreign Ministry, who expressed his opinion that Dürich's journey was a mistake, for which reason he would recommend Štefánik's application to the goodwill of the War Ministry.

This was the first time that the Quai d'Orsay had officially negotiated with the Czechoslovak National Council and with Dr Beneš, its Secretary-General. From that date the Quai d'Orsay did not recognize officially any other Czech organization, and by that interview with de Margerie on June 30th, 1916, Dr Beneš became *de facto* Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia. There was another fruit that ripened in due course on the prickly bush of the Dürich-Štefánik embranglement. Štefánik had consulted Lacaze, the Minister of Marine, about the technical preparation for the transport from Vladivostok and Archangel of the Czech prisoners of war he was proposing to bring back to fight for France, and when he had left for Russia Dr Beneš continued to work on that technical preparation very energetically. "By a combination of circumstances it concluded with the famous Siberian anabasis." That astounding military feat was still many months away in the future when Štefánik left for Russia at the end of July. He and Beneš had discussed in detail how the Czech troops were to be organized when they reached France and what preparations should be made for the beginnings of the Czech army. Dr Beneš suggested to the Quai d'Orsay that they should officially notify the Ministry of War and Marshal Joffre that they were to "identify themselves with the policy which the French Government, by arranging Štefánik's mission, was inaugurating" in Czech affairs and in its attitude to the National Council. They were also instructed to make preparations for the transport of the Czechoslovak prisoners of war from Russia to France. This led to Štefánik's being invited to G.Q.G. at Chantilly, where two days before his journey he received his own orders from the French Supreme Command.

Dürich had already started to intrigue against the leadership of Masaryk, with the support of the Russian Foreign Office, who suspected Masaryk of a radicalism hostile to the Tsarist Government. There was a split between the Czech Association of Petrograd, which followed Štefánik, and the Kiev Association, which adhered to Dürich. Štefánik managed to re-establish unity, and the Kiev Memorandum of August

29th, 1916, recognized the supreme authority of the National Council with Masaryk as the head of it. This memorandum was unwelcome to the Russian Foreign Office, which brought pressure on Dürich to repudiate it and proposed a National Council in Russia under him with the establishment there of a Czechoslovak Army. The Petrograd and Kiev branches of the League split again, and in November a resolution was passed acknowledging Deputy Dürich as the head of the movement in Russia as Professor Masaryk was in Western Europe. There was a bitter struggle between the Western and Eastern groups of supporters which reached a climax when the Russian Government financed Dürich's schism, and approved his statutes. The National Council in Paris expelled Dürich in February 1917, and a month later the Government which had supported him fell, Milyukov, a friend of Masaryk's, becoming Foreign Minister.

At last, on May 6th, 1917, a congress at Kiev, including representatives of the Czechoslovak colonists, soldiers in the Brigade, and prisoners of war, unanimously passed the following resolution:

"The Czechoslovak National Council, with Professor Masaryk at its head, is the supreme organ of the Czechoslovak national political struggle, and it is therefore the duty of every Czech and Slovak to submit to its management."

Soon after this Masaryk himself reached Russia, amid the fighting and confusion of the Revolution, and impressed upon the world his leadership, his courage, his honesty, and his wisdom. It is a tale of which nobody who aspires to learn what grandeur the spirit of man may achieve when it submits itself with humility and ardent faith to the Divine will can afford to be ignorant.

We must return to Paris in the summer of 1916 and to the indefatigable Beneš, noting that the firmness with which the National Council in Paris handled the prospective schism much impressed Allied opinion. The Poles and Yugoslavs also had their quarrels, and those had not been settled by such a demonstration of essential unity. The example set by the Czechs and Slovaks in 1916 and 1917 is even more apposite in 1944 than it was then, and it is well to remember that Dr Beneš, to whom in 1916 and 1917 the National Council owed so much for the superlatively skilful way in which he turned what might have been a disastrous handicap into a positive advantage, has in 1944 and 1945 devoted his unparagoned experience as a European statesman to problems larger and more complicated, but not essentially dissimilar from those which tested his tactful constructiveness during the First World War.

Two days after Štefánik left for Russia Dr Beneš spent a fortnight with Professor Masaryk in London. There he met Milyukov and heard Masaryk expound to him his plan for the reorganization of Central Europe, with which the Russian Cadet leader expressed his agreement. Masaryk's anxiety about the future of Russia had evidently not been allayed by the talks with Milyukov, and no doubt the uncertainty about it seemed to him to threaten the ruin of a plan to create a Czechoslovak army in the West, on his ability to do which he was counting to achieve his grand design. He and Beneš went to Oxford together to interview some of the dons and to have a further talk with Dmowski and Milyukov, who were lecturing there.

Dr Beneš has recorded¹ the mood this visit cast over Masaryk:

"Our visit to Oxford is associated with memories which I recall with great emotion. It was at a time when the prospects of our success were precarious, and when we daily had to face the possibility of spending the rest of our lives abroad under conditions of great hardship. Professor Masaryk, too, had to contend with great anxieties about his family. Alice Masaryk, his daughter, had recently been imprisoned, and Mme Masaryk, whose health was now seriously impaired, was living isolated at Prague. 'When I take everything into account,' said Masaryk to me on our way back to London, 'I often consider whether I ought not to go home again. Of course, they would hang me, but at least I should see my wife once more; and I am afraid that she will not live till the end of the war. It would cause a stir among our people at home and would certainly stiffen their opposition to Vienna.'

"I was deeply moved by these remarks, which caused me to reflect upon my own personal troubles. At that very moment my wife was in some Viennese prison, and the whole outlook was dark and uncertain. Nevertheless, I reminded myself that whether our undertaking ended in victory or defeat, what was now happening would one day be regarded as a great epoch in the history of our nation. Moreover, I had been brought closer to Professor Masaryk by what he had said to me, and I felt grateful to Providence for having allowed me to work with him at so great a task. Thus it was that I returned to Paris, strengthened and encouraged for further work.

"With the acceptance of the plan to transport the Czechoslovak prisoners of war from Russia to France, Masaryk was insistent that the French military authorities should do something about the Czechoslovak prisoners of war who had survived the Serbian retreat, in which they had preferred to take part rather than be rescued by the Austro-

¹ *My War Memoirs*, pp. 132, 133.

German forces. Originally there had been about 25,000, of whom some 11,000 had reached the Albanian coast and had been taken to the island of Asinra, where in dreadful conditions another 7000 died of typhus and dysentery, their bodies being thrown into the sea. The survivors had been transported to France through the intervention of the Serbian Government and the Czechoslovak National Council, and even there they were wretchedly situated.

"If the official world of politics knew little about us at that time, the subordinate authorities were almost completely ignorant of us and treated our people accordingly. There were, of course, exceptions, but on the whole what our people went through everywhere was a calvary of suffering. . . . On Slavonic territory they were just as badly off as elsewhere. I am not complaining of this, but merely placing the fact on record. It will help to throw an accurate light on our movement abroad."¹

Dr Beneš returned to France on August 17th, charged by Masaryk to agitate with the French Government with a view to obtaining the release of Czech prisoners of war and reconstituting them as a combatant force. It was vital to succeed in doing this in France first so as not to imperil success in extricating the 10,000 or more Czechoslovak prisoners of war in Italy, which was the next objective.

By September 21st, after pulling every wire he could, Dr Beneš persuaded the Ministry of War to telegraph instructions to the various camps that the Czech and Slovak prisoners were to be separated from the Austrian and Hungarian and at the same time to be accorded some considerate treatment. This roused opposition at G.Q.G., Chantilly, probably from the Intelligence people, who suffered from chronic espionage and had visions of considerately treated Czechs and Slovaks spying for the Habsburgs with impunity. Dr Beneš tried to break down this opposition by petitioning M. Briand, and the Quai d'Orsay at the Prime Minister's request put him in touch with the head of the central department in Paris which dealt with matters relating to prisoners of war. On October 18th, 1916, an agreement was reached with him, subject to the approval of G.Q.G., by which there was to be a partial concentration in exclusively Czechoslovak camps, with more amenities, to which approved representatives of the National Council were to have access for the purpose of propaganda for a national army among those by now much embittered prisoners. Dr Beneš had his own contacts at Chantilly and was in the habit of visiting Colonel Billote regularly with news of Štefánik's activities in Russia. He also

¹ *My War Memoirs*, pp. 134, 135.

had much help from General Rašič, the chief liaison officer between the Supreme Command and the Serbian Government.

On the day after the agreement about the prisoners of war Dr Beneš went to Chantilly to show Colonel Billote the last set of reports received from Russia about the progress of the negotiations there for the transport of the Czechoslovak prisoners of war to France. From Chantilly he crossed that night to Southampton, taking with him Štefánik's report to show Masaryk in London. At Southampton, after a rough voyage from Havre, Dr Beneš was "stopped and subjected to an extremely unpleasant examination, and then imprisoned." The documents, which in the eyes of the English authorities formed a striking proof that he was a spy, were confiscated, and he was released with an apology only after "long and difficult proceedings." "To-day it is pleasant to recall all this," the victim records, "but during the war it was very far from amusing. It wasted time, energy, health, and nerves."¹

It is beating a dead ass to mock at the aberrations of minor officials; but surely in the long catalogue of war's miseries and horrors a high place must be awarded to the power it puts into the hands of the incompetent and the temporary importance it allows to normally insignificant men and women.

"The actual work connected with the prisoners of war, which now became an actual fact," Dr Beneš records, "as a result of the agreement reached with the authorities, proceeded very slowly. For weeks at a time it was necessary to carry on negotiations and then intervene almost every day in order to overcome prejudices, bureaucratic inaction and pettiness, as well as political ignorance and failure to understand the point at issue."

¹ It is also pleasant for me to recall that in that October 1916 a British suspect notified by me was allowed by the Passport Control on board the steamer for Havre without any passport at all, merely on the strength of a torn sheet of War Office paper on which had been scribbled in blue pencil "M.I.6," and that the French authorities on the strength of the same torn sheet of paper gave him a free passage to Greece, from which, with much difficulty, I had secured his absence.

CHAPTER VIII

ON December 12th, 1915, an emergency meeting of the Reichstag was summoned to hear the Chancellor make an important statement. This was nothing less than a formal offer by the Central Powers to enter into peace negotiations with the Allies. It seemed a propitious moment after the complete defeat of Rumania and the re-election of what at that time was believed in Germany to be a President prepared to go to any lengths to avoid bringing the United States into the war.

It is worth while noting the stock German formula to which all the profuse and malodorous verbosity of Hitler has been unable to add anything new. German speeches about other nations provide an interminable echo of one another from Frederick the Great to Dr Goebbels—German readiness for peace had always been evaded by their adversaries. His Majesty the Emperor had personally had to take the gravest decision that ever fell to the lot of a German when he was compelled to give the order for mobilization on August 1st, 1914. During the long and anxious years of war the Emperor had been moved by a single thought: how to safeguard Germany after her victorious struggle. In a deep moral and religious sense of duty towards the nation, and beyond it towards humanity, the Emperor now considered that the moment had come for official action on behalf of peace, and His Majesty, in complete harmony and in common with their Allies, had decided to propose to the hostile Powers to enter into peace negotiations. The representatives of Spain, the United States of America, and Switzerland had been invited to transmit a note to the hostile Powers.

This Note, after asserting the military might of the Central Powers, protested that there was no desire on their part to annihilate their enemies, and, therefore, that in spite of the fact that the war had been forced upon them the Central Powers, to avoid bloodshed, were willing to discuss peace on the basis of guaranteeing their existence, their honour, and their liberty of evolution.

The Chancellor went on to say that if these proposals were declined every German heart would burn with sacred wrath against enemies who were unwilling to stop human slaughter in order that their schemes of conquest and annihilation might continue. As those words of 1916 were being transcribed the German Press, faced with another defeat in

1945, ignoring the assault on Poland in 1939, was accusing Great Britain of beginning the war and Russia of making it a world war.

On December 20th President Wilson invited the belligerent Powers to state in definite language the aims for which they were fighting and the terms on which they would consent to make peace.

In the Allied reply to the Peace Note of the Central Powers this sentence was included: "No peace is possible so long as they (the Allies) have not secured reparation of violated rights and liberties, recognition of the principle of nationality, and of the free existence of small States."

This was the first categorical statement of such principles in a collective proclamation, and when it was published on the last day of 1916 it inspired Dr Beneš to intensify the struggle for an ambitious objective he had set himself as representative of the Czechoslovak National Council.

On December 27th he had had a first conversation with Albert Kammerer, who was representing Philippe Berthelot, now head of the political section at the Quai d'Orsay, and had urged upon him the need to encourage Czech and Slovak disaffection in Austria-Hungary by expressly mentioning the national demands of both Czechs and Slovaks in the Allied reply to President Wilson's note which was under discussion. Kammerer had cast a damper on the spirits of Dr Beneš by pointing out that the general feeling among the Allies was that it would be premature to enumerate the individual nations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire whose independence was aimed at and furthermore that the Allies were unwilling to make a public promise to fight until the Empire was broken up, because circumstances might make it impossible to fulfil such a promise. In fact, as the conversation was developed, the French official had made it clear that strong influences among the Allies were averse from any commitment at all about the future of Austria-Hungary.

To this Dr Beneš had replied that conditions in Austria were now so much worse than the Allies supposed that a clear declaration about Allied intentions with regard to Austria-Hungary, so far from prolonging the war, would, on the contrary, certainly shorten it. Before the interview was closed Kammerer suggested that Dr Beneš should write a special memorandum summarizing the arguments he had put forward, so that it might be submitted to Berthelot and Pichon, the French Foreign Minister.

Two days later the memorandum was handed to Kammerer. It summed up the political situation in Austria judged by the newspapers and the special reports from the "Maffia," and it concluded as follows:

"The Czechs form an element which, under present conditions, causes Austria-Hungary the greatest internal difficulties. If, in replying to Wilson, you recognize our political aims and plans you will strengthen their opposition to Austria, which will be completely disorganized."

Kammerer placed the memorandum before his chiefs, and promised that Beneš should be received by Berthelot soon. Berthelot received Beneš, listened to what he had to say, and referred him back to Kammerer. This meeting produced nothing fresh, and meanwhile, the Allied Note replying to the German peace offer had been published. The principle of recognizing nationality had been collectively proclaimed. What was the objection to specifying the nationalities that were to be recognized? Dr Beneš was determined to clarify this vagueness.

After the final interview at the Quai d'Orsay he thought of a possible way to galvanize official inertia and timidity. On the very same day, with the help of Professor Moysset, a "clear-minded and brilliant scholar," who was the *chef du cabinet* of M. Leygues, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French Chamber, Beneš was enabled to submit a new memorandum. On top of this Beneš, through another friend, secured a meeting with André Tardieu, then the chief leader-writer for *Le Temps*. Tardieu, impressed by Beneš's arguments, promised to write an article on the Czechoslovak movement in his paper, and on January 3rd, 1917, this duly appeared, producing "a considerable effect in political circles."

Wasting no time after his talk with M. Leygues, Dr Beneš now sought another interview at the Quai d'Orsay, where he heard from Kammerer that a discussion of the National Council's demands had produced three plans and possibilities:

- (a) It might be possible to insert into the Note a declaration with regard to the Czechoslovaks.
- (b) If this proved too difficult it would be possible for Briand to make a Parliamentary declaration on the subject of the Czechs.
- (c) Briand would be prepared to receive the Secretary of the National Council at an official audience and make the declaration to him. In such a case the audience would be arranged so as to obtain ample publicity.¹

Dr Beneš, having discovered that so much attention had been paid to his efforts, was determined to get plan (a) adopted. He insisted to Kammerer that unless the declaration were inserted in the Note the Czechs at home would not be impressed, and in case the phrasing of the

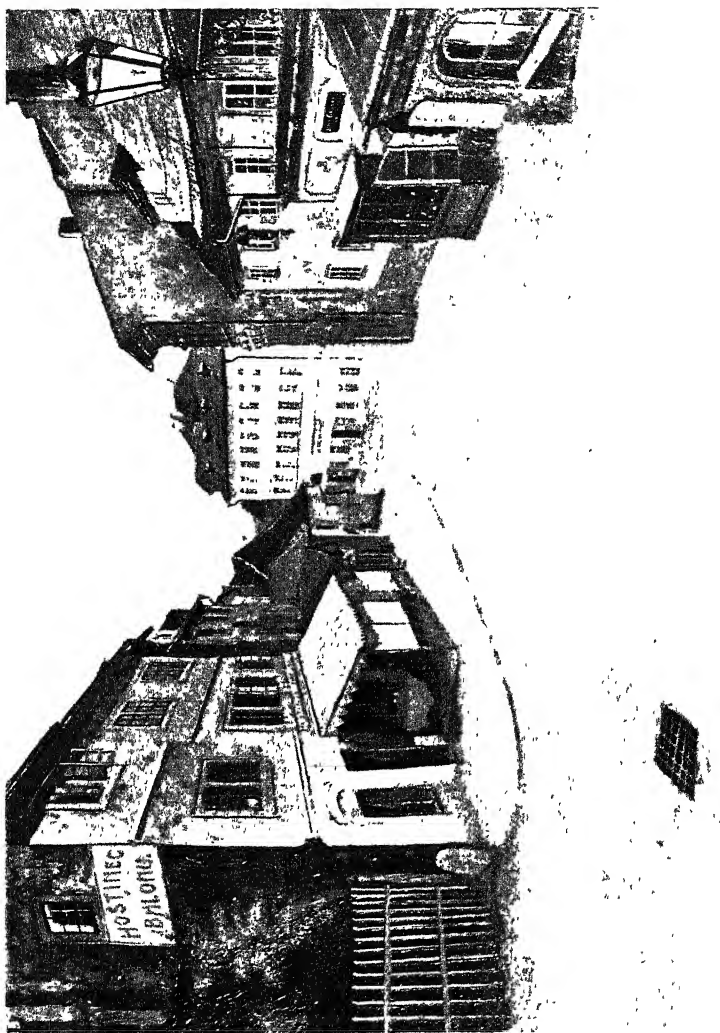
¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 156.

declaration should puzzle the drafters of the Note, Dr Beneš obligingly supplied the French official with a formula which would satisfy Czechoslovak aspirations. When Kammerer told him that the general sentence on the liberation of the Austro-Hungarian nations had already been agreed upon by the Allies and drafted for the Note Beneš pointed out that his formula could comfortably be fitted into that general sentence. With this he left Kammerer, whom one fancies like a harassed goal-keeper bombarded by terrific shots from a tough, agile, and relentless outside left.

On January 3rd, the same day as the Tardieu article in *Le Temps*, there was an article on the front page of *Le Matin* prepared by Dr Beneš himself, and to clinch matters journalistically a leading article in the *Journal des Débats* by Dr Beneš's friend Auguste Gauvain demanding "an unequivocal declaration of the Allies against Austro-Hungary in favour of the oppressed nations." This in an organ of Catholic and Conservative opinion could not fail to influence both official and public opinion.

On January 4th, 1917, Dr Beneš was invited to the Quai d'Orsay for a final interview, when Kammerer informed him that it had been decided, on principle, to do something for the Czech movement, but that the form of it would probably be decided at the Inter-Allied Conference then being held in Rome. What had already been agreed in the drafting of the Note was that the Allies should state in general terms the necessity for liberating the Slavs, Italians, and Rumanians in Austria-Hungary. If the Czechs and Slovaks were specifically mentioned the Croats, Slovenes, and Serbs would expect to be specifically mentioned, and to that the Italians were strongly opposed. Kammerer promised, however, on behalf of the French Government that a specific mention of the Czechs should be made. Beneš at once reminded Kammerer of the importance of mentioning the Slovaks as well, and once again put forward his formula that one of the Allied war aims was "the liberation of the Czechs united with Slovakia" or else "the liberation of the Czechoslovaks." Either would be welcome to the National Council, which, of course, left it to the Allies to word it as they thought best to suit the context.

On January 7th, Dr Beneš was informed by the Quai d'Orsay that the French proposal to mention the Czechoslovaks had been accepted as an amendment after the previous formula had been agreed upon. This was apparent in its clumsy wording which merely added "Czechoslovaks" to the "Slavs, Italians, and Roumanians" of the original draft, and when it was published the Yugoslavs were much upset by the



A STREET IN OLD PRAGUE
Oil painting by Jan Minařík (1862–1937).



BOHEMIAN LANDSCAPE

Oil painting by Antonín Slavíček (1870–1910).
From the private collection of President Beneš

failure to mention them with equal particularity. The Note was published on January 12th, 1917, and from London Masaryk telegraphed to Dr Beneš:

"The success is unexpectedly great. Inform me whether we owe it to Briand. It will now be possible to state the fact in the papers. Your share in the success will also be appreciated."

At that Rome Conference the French were pressing upon the British the need of strong action against King Constantine in Greece, and Mr Balfour had just given a promise to the King that no more Greek islands should declare themselves in favour of the provisional Government set up at Salonica by Venizelos, Condouriotis, and Danglis. At the same time the Italians were pressing upon the French and British their objections to any encouragement being given to Croats and Slovenes. The Italians supported the British in their protection of King Constantine, and the British, in their anxiety on his account, were disinclined to quarrel with the French over the Czechs and Slovaks. Equally the Italians, in their anxiety to have their way about including any mention of the Yugoslavs, were willing to defer to French wishes in the matter of the Czechs and Slovaks. So the French amendment was accepted, it would seem, without any of the three parties quite realizing how far they were committed by that amendment to the recognition of a new State called Czechoslovakia. The whole of that Rome Conference may have been a *macédoine* of cross-purposes political, military, and naval; but when we have admitted Beneš's luck in getting the answer to the Wilson Note finally agreed upon in such an atmosphere of mutual suspicion, masked aims, and divergent policies, he must be accorded all the credit for the diplomatic adroitness with which he secured his objective.

The significance of the statement that the Allies were pledged to liberate the Czechoslovaks was not lost upon the various headquarters of the movement abroad. Letters and telegrams of congratulations were received from the American and Russian colonies of Czechs, from Czechs and Slovaks in Italy, Switzerland, and elsewhere, and most gratefully of all from the Czech and Slovak troops, which stimulated and encouraged Beneš to continue the work of the National Council for the success of the military movement.

Masaryk had deeply impressed Briand when in February 1916 he put before him the idea for the future of Central Europe which lay behind the recognition of Czechoslovak aspirations; but Briand was a lazy man, and even although he allowed an official *communiqué* to go forth about the sympathy of France with those aspirations, he could

never have brought himself to take the trouble to give practical effect to such sympathy. And Masaryk was not the man to take advantage of his personal contact with Briand by pestering him to say or do this or that as Prime Minister of France. Masaryk's creative genius was never more evident than when he chose Dr Beneš to become the practical exponent of his ideas, and fixed upon Paris as his headquarters. When Lloyd George lamented that Czechoslovakia was represented at the Peace Conference not by her wise leader, President Masaryk, but by an impulsive, clever, but much less sagacious and more short-sighted politician, he showed a strange misunderstanding of the relationship between President Masaryk and his Foreign Minister. To condemn Dr Beneš for impulsiveness, cleverness, lack of sagacity, and political myopia is to condemn President Masaryk himself for the same faults, for between the two men no shadow of disagreement is discoverable. That Dr Beneš, when he succeeded Masaryk as President of Czechoslovakia, displayed some lack of sagacity and some political myopia is undeniable; but inasmuch as his own lack of sagacity was displayed by believing in the sagacity of Great Britain and his political myopia by refusing to believe that France would dishonour a solemn pact, it is not for a British or a French statesman to criticize him for being foolish and short-sighted.

CHAPTER IX

DR BENEŠ read the Allied Note in a morning paper he bought at a station just before Rome, which he was visiting for the first time with a view to seeing what prospects there were of organizing the movement in Italy. Masaryk and Štefánik had both made some good friends in Rome, but that was all.

This arrival at Rome on January 12th, 1917, gave Beneš a "deep and lasting gratification," associated as it was with the success of his diplomacy behind the scenes at the Rome Conference which had just concluded. There is a reflection of that consciousness of success in his visit to the French and Russian Embassies. Both Ambassadors as well as all their two staffs were cordial. "I have the most pleasant memories of those negotiations," he writes,¹ "more particularly since at that time I was a beginner in diplomatic matters, and at Rome I entered more fully than at Paris into what was then a new world to me."

That little confession is revealing. In spite of having achieved a triumph of which an ambassador himself would have been proud he was obviously still very much aware of being a new boy and gratefully astonished at the friendliness of the French and Russian Ambassadors to the Quirinal.

After being received by them Dr Beneš felt entitled to tackle the Consulta, where he was accorded an interview by Demartino, the Secretary-General. "Being a novice," he writes,² "and more particularly one who had come to ask a favour, I was considerably disconcerted by his bureaucratic reserve and the self-assurance of his manner as a diplomat."

The modesty and the frankness of that comment are worth attention.

Little was accomplished during this first visit to Rome, where foreign policy was preoccupied with what was believed to be the threat offered to Italian interests from the emergence of a unified Yugoslav State. Moreover, the Czechoslovak case received a sharp rebuff from Vienna, where the League of Czech Deputies provided Count Czernin, the new Foreign Minister, with some valuable propagandist ammunition in the shape of the following resolution published on January 31st:

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 168.

² *My War Memoirs*, p. 170.

“With regard to the reply of the Entente States to President Wilson, in which it is declared that one of the war aims of the countries fighting against our Monarchy is the liberation of the Czechs from foreign rule, the presidency of the Czech League repudiates this insinuation, which is based upon entirely false suppositions, and it emphatically proclaims that, as always in the past, so too at the present time and also in the future, the Czech nation envisages the conditions of its development only beneath the sceptre of the Habsburgs.”

On that same January 31st, 1917, the German Ambassador in Washington handed President Wilson notice of the intensification of the submarine war and a week later he was handed his passport. The breaking off of diplomatic relations could only end in war, when Germany decided to translate her threats into action. The Austro-Hungarian Government had disapproved of the German submarine plan, but it did not dare to oppose it openly. From that time, however, Czernin kept before the Emperor Charles, who had succeeded to the throne after Francis Joseph had mouldered away in November 1916, the possibility of that separate peace which through 1917 and 1918 danced like a will-o'-the-wisp across the treacherous marsh of secret negotiation.

When the United States declared war on Germany, and when the revolution began in Russia, the impossibility of a victory for the Central Powers became so clear that public opinion in the Czech lands was much exasperated by the pusillanimity of the deputies—so much so that after Miliukov proclaimed the intention of Prince Lvov's Provisional Government to help in the establishment of a Czechoslovak State the League of Deputies published a manifesto in April 1917 which showed a markedly more resolute tone. Dr Beneš, after consultation with Masaryk, then on the point of making his momentous journey to Russia, sent some strongly worded advice in which he pointed out that the work of the National Council must not be jeopardized by allowing the Austrophiles in Allied countries to argue that the Czechs did not want their independence. He urged the Czech deputies never to vote with the Government on any point, not to assist at any manifestations of loyalty in the Reichsrat, to set up a passive opposition, and to demand State rights. “Whatever you do,” he concluded, “there must be no repetition of the mistake made in 1848. None of you must vindicate the existence of Austria. Remember that there is a revolution in Russia, and that Russia will be a republic.”

On May 19th, 1917, just about the time when the National Council's demands reached Prague, a proclamation signed by 150 Czech poets,

poetic dramatists, novelists, and artists was published, in which responsible Czech politicians were adjured to speak and act in Parliament on behalf of the Czech nation as the nation really desired. Finally, on May 30th, the League of Deputies published a proclamation which, while for tactical reasons it admitted the possibility of transforming the Habsburg Empire into a federated State of free national states, contained the following important affirmation:

"In this historical moment, taking our stand upon the natural right of a nation to self-determination and free development, which in our case is strengthened by inalienable historical rights and by State documents which are fully recognized, we, at the head of our people, will strive after a union of all branches of the Czechoslovak nation in a democratic State, in respect of which it is not possible to leave out of account the Slovak branch, living as a complete unit coherently associated with Czech historical territory."

Those who are still inclined to believe that it was a mistake not to encourage that Austrian Federation with a Habsburg at the head of it should bear in mind that such a federation must have collapsed as soon as Pan-German pressure became strong. None of the means proposed to civilize the Germans can possibly be effective so long as they are liable to the fever of Pan-Germanism, the most pestilential carriers of which are not the military class but the philosophers and historians. The determination of Masaryk and Beneš to destroy Austria-Hungary was nurtured by the experience of having lived under the domination of a race which believed in its right to dominate other races. If that domination was encouraged in Austria it must inevitably serve as a stimulus to German dreams of a wider domination over the whole Slavonic race.

Masaryk had foreseen as far back as 1915 that the only really effective argument on behalf of Czechoslovak independence would be a Czechoslovak army. With the threat that the preservation of Austria offered to the achievement of that perfect independence to which he aspired for his country Masaryk was more profoundly convinced than ever that an army was necessary, and he made up his mind to go to Russia, now that the reactionaries who liked neither him nor the Allies had been superseded. At the end of 1916 Štefánik had been organizing hundreds of prisoners of war on the Rumanian front for service in France. He had then returned to Russia but came over to visit Masaryk in April, and went to Italy for a month, whence he crossed the Atlantic to put into action his scheme for the enlistment of Czech and Slovak volunteers. Štefánik's romantic career would need a book to itself.

"His methods were those of an apostle rather than of a diplomat and soldier. In Paris, where he had gradually made a circle of friends and admirers," Masaryk writes,¹ "he smoothed the way for me and for Dr Beneš in many influential quarters and he did the same in Rome. When I think of him I always remember the picture of our little Slovak tinkers who wander through the world; but this Slovak wandered through all the Allied fronts, through all Government Departments, political drawing-rooms and Courts. From him Marshal Foch heard for the first time about us and our work against Austria."

The fascinating story of Masaryk's own adventures in Russia has to be passed over in order to concentrate on Dr Beneš's so much less picturesque struggle with French bureaucracy to create in France itself the nucleus of that Czechoslovak army on which so much depended for the liberation of the Czechs and the Slovaks. If Dr Beneš ever sighed for the excitement the two other members of the triumvirate enjoyed, there is never a hint of it in his own book. What did move him was the discovery that Masaryk, before he left for Russia in May 1917, had written his will (together with some political notes) in the form of a letter addressed to him. This document he gave to his daughter Olga, with the message that Dr Beneš was to act as his executor if he did not return. Of this proof of the esteem and trust his leader had for him Dr Beneš writes:

"I was deeply touched by this episode, which occurred when we had little time for personal feelings. I am not sentimental, but I sat for hours over that sealed letter in August 1917, and wondered what would happen to Masaryk and what would be the fate of our movement."

That sentence is like a bar or two from a dumka of Dvořák: a moment later the furiant succeeds.

"After Štefánik's departure to America I embarked upon a series of activities, the scope of which I made as wide as possible. . . . My work in the National Council at Paris was guided by the principle of imparting a general European character to everything we did, whether in politics or military affairs. . . ."

Dr Beneš admits that the actual discussions with the various Ministers about the organization of the Czechoslovak army caused him some difficulties. He received as much help as Sychrava could give him, but Dr Sychrava was also without military experience. So Dr Beneš became a student again. He bought a quantity of books on military subjects and "made a rapid study of army organization, modern

¹ *The Making of a State*, p. 104.

warfare, the new military aspects of the Great War, and various current military topics in general."

Eventually many of the Czech volunteer officers in the Foreign Legion came forward with advice, but Dr Beneš distrusted their innocence of political training. He discovered in them a lack of judgment and "a marked bent for adventurous escapades" and preferred to deal personally with all negotiations on army matters. One can fancy a Slovak Colonel Blimpánik asking a Czech Colonel Blimpář what on earth this busybody meant by butting into matters he knew nothing about.

Yet, by the very first meeting on June 20th, 1917, with General Vidalon, who was head of the department at the French War Ministry that dealt with the organization of national armies, Dr Beneš had assimilated enough military theory to discuss ten knotty problems, from uniform to the conditions under which the army could be used at the front. The Ministry of War suggested that the proposed Czechoslovak army should be organized like the Polish army in France by a mixed commission under a French General which would form a link between the French Government and the National Council. Dr Beneš had other ideas. He demanded that the army should depend directly on the National Council as representatives of a sovereign nation, and, probably by ruthless volubility, he won that point and every other point. One of them was the right of the troops to take an oath of allegiance to the Czechoslovak nation. Dr Beneš, having secured from the Ministry of War all he asked from them, tackled the Quai d'Orsay, the officials of which were somewhat shaken to find how far the arrangement with the Ministry of War had committed them politically. Their nervousness is intelligible when one remembers that throughout 1917 and well into 1918 there were hopes of securing a separate peace with Austria, a daydream which Mr Lloyd George and General Smuts in particular much enjoyed. General Smuts was having secret meetings with Austrian noblemen in Switzerland and had devoted six months to mugging up the Austrian question, at the end of which he was uncertain whether Moravia was in Austria or Hungary. The business went on until Mr Lloyd George, General Smuts, Count Czernin, and the Emperor Charles had all put their feet well into it, when Clemenceau put his foot through it.

The climax was reached when the Quai d'Orsay found that Dr Beneš had arranged for all expenditure on the army to be recorded in special accounts for which the Czechoslovak state would make itself responsible after the peace negotiations. Dr Beneš explained that he

was trying to "clarify the discussions in this respect," but he had to surrender over what the Quai d'Orsay called "a far-reaching political commitment," which was a clarification they were not prepared to face at that time. Nevertheless, although the agreement when drafted did not incorporate all that Dr Beneš had asked for, it incorporated quite enough to make August 4th, 1917, the day on which the negotiations with the Quai d'Orsay were completed, "one of my happiest days throughout the course of our movement abroad," Dr Beneš records.¹ "In my mind's eye I saw the army in course of formation, the National Council as a Government, our share in the Peace Conference, and the establishment of our State."

In this happy mood he went to Rome that September for a second visit, with the idea of clarifying matters there. It is symptomatic of the steady rise in Beneš's reputation that Sonnino, the Italian Foreign Minister, received him immediately and discussed the question of the transfer of the Czechoslovak troops to France with a frankness of *egoismo* which Dr Beneš evidently appreciated. Sonnino's decision was to be taken after the Consulta had examined the proposals from a legal and technical point of view. Demartino, the Secretary-General, received Dr Beneš next day, and this time there was none of that Foreign Office high-hatting which Dr Beneš had called "bureaucratic reserve." Beneš communicated to the French and Russian Ambassadors the result of his negotiations with the Italian authorities. He also informed Sir Rennell Rodd, whom he found sympathetic, and he became friendly with Sir Samuel Hoare, who was head of the British Military Mission in Rome. They were staying at the same hotel. That hotel is another symptom of Dr Beneš's steady rise, for it was the fashionable hotel of Rome—the Grand. Dr Beneš pays a tribute to the valuable services Sir Samuel Hoare rendered to the Czechoslovak cause in Rome. He also urged Dr Beneš to visit London and obtain there a personal recognition of the National Council, promising to do all he could to help. That too is symptomatic of Dr Beneš's steady rise.

The result of the visit to Rome is summarized in a telegram which Beneš sent to Masaryk in Russia through the kind offices of Sir Samuel Hoare:

"I have completed all political negotiations here and we are beginning the organization of the troops. The result of our work is this: complete recognition of the National Council, liberation of all internal civilians, establishment of Czechoslovak Labour Corps on second line of defence. Fear of reprisals on the part of Austria compels Italy to

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 196.

maintain certain reservations. The rights of our troops have therefore been somewhat restricted. But on the whole the success is complete and in a short time will be supplemented."

The only person not pleased was the French Ambassador. He thought that Dr Beneš should have insisted on the transfer of the troops to France.

In October Beneš went to London, where Sir Samuel Hoare, who was there at the same time, introduced him to Lord Robert Cecil. Lord Robert knew and much esteemed Masaryk. "I made no concrete demand," Dr Beneš says, "wishing merely to gain confidence for my subsequent action." The brief account of this first visit to London after Masaryk's departure to Russia is faintly touched by an emotion of awe over his own achievement in gaining the confidence of these Olympians.

When Dr Beneš got back to Paris at the end of the month he found that Štefánik would soon be returning from America, and he managed to secure the postponement of the publication of the decree about the organization of the Czechoslovak army in order to obtain Štefánik's approval as a soldier of how the National Council had handled military affairs during his absence. Štefánik, when he arrived in November, criticized only the first article of the decree, which declared that the French Government was constituting the Czechoslovak army. He wanted the constitution to be attributed to the National Council and the Czechoslovak nation itself. Dr Beneš admitted that the political significance made the change desirable, but he could not bring himself to argue about any fresh concessions, acutely aware as he was of the "considerable indulgences" the French Government had shown towards himself. However, Štefánik took up the argument, and after a month of it settled with a compromise. The paternity of the French Government and the National Council were both omitted, and new phraseology brought the Czechoslovak army into being by a sort of parthenogenesis.

Clemenceau had become Prime Minister in November 1917, and the decree establishing the Czechoslovak army was signed by Poincaré, Clemenceau, and Pichon: the actual date of publication was February 7th, 1918.

Away in Russia, Masaryk took advantage of that decree to affirm that the Czechoslovak troops there were part of the autonomous Czechoslovak army in France, and after Brest-Litovsk he claimed for them the right of being transferred to France. He had resisted all the attempts to persuade him to authorize the Czech Legion, 50,000 strong, to turn their arms against the Bolsheviks, and before he left for Vladi-

vostok, after being nearly a year in Russia, Masaryk had secured recognition of the Legion's position by Moscow. When on the way to Vladivostok he heard of the British disaster in the great German offensive of March 21st, and the militant tone of the Siberian papers made him anxious about the Legion's position. However, before he sailed for Japan Masaryk had the satisfaction of hearing that the Moscow Commissar Stalin had telegraphed to the local Soviets that the Council of the People's Commissars wished every assistance to be given to the Czechoslovaks on Russian soil. More than two years would pass before that Czech Legion reached home after fighting their way across Asia in that astounding anabasis which at the time captivated the imagination of the West and was of immense value to the newly created State.

Meanwhile, in France, the Czechoslovak army was fighting its way out through entanglements of red tape which threatened at one time to defeat its effectiveness. The first ingredients of that army consisted of some hundreds of prisoners of war whom Štefánik had managed to transport from Rumania to France by June 1917. The French military authorities had failed to make any preparations for their arrival and they were sent to the department of Landes—that dismal waste of pines and sand south of Bordeaux where the inhabitants walk on stilts. Here they found themselves in a dreary camp with black troops and Russian troops. They were no longer prisoners of war, but on the other hand they were not yet free soldiers, pending the discussions about their status which were still going on with the French Ministers. In November a detachment of Czechoslovaks recruited by the French in Russia, eleven hundred strong, reached Havre from Archangel, and were sent to Cognac, near Bordeaux, where after a struggle with officialdom the Rumanian contingent joined them. Shortly afterwards a number of Czech officers from the Serbian army arrived, and the problem of a shortage of officers at once became the problem of a surplus. Cognac was less demoralizing than the camp in the Landes, but it was thoroughly unsatisfactory. In the words of Dr Beneš,¹ "The bureaucratic mechanism of the Ministry did not move with any rapidity even in dealing with matters relating to the military administration at Cognac, which were quite independent of any decree."

These 2000 volunteers were still treated neither as soldiers nor prisoners of war. There were difficulties over food, accommodation, and command. Six weeks of this uncertainty enraged these volunteers who had arrived in France full of enthusiasm, expecting to find an

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 269.

independent army. They blamed the National Council for the position in which they found themselves, and particularly Dr Beneš, who had much difficulty in pacifying them. Even when their juridical position was established there were all sorts of grievances, one of the sharpest of which was the insistence of the French military authorities that all the officers, many of whom had fought successfully with the Russian armies against the Austrians, must undergo training from the very beginning under French officers. As for the troops, they were regarded with suspicion both by the authorities and the civil population as germ-carriers of Bolshevism.

Dr Beneš, who had already witnessed the way "French military circles had ruthlessly disparaged the Polish army on account of various disorders and disputes while in the course of formation," was determined that the Czechoslovak army should exact admiration:

"Realizing thus how fateful the consequences would be to us if at this early stage we were to make the slightest blunder, I was uncompromising towards the troops. I insisted that they should unconditionally submit to all instructions from Paris, and in particular I prohibited them from engaging in politics, for that was a subject about which the Ministry of War was most touchy. And so for several months there was continual tension between Cognac and the National Council in Paris. I deliberately overlooked the unpopularity among the troops which I had incurred at the outset. My hope was that after a certain time they would realize that I was in the right, and all the reasonable elements soon did so. I must admit that I often subjected their patience to a severe test, and this only makes their merits all the more praiseworthy. I now affirm that our officers and men from France reached the highest standard of all our troops, and it was not long before the Ministry of War itself began to confirm me in this view. Within three months our troops had won the approval of the French Government, but the difficulties and the nerve-racking disputes which arose in connection with this military enterprise, taken in conjunction with the increasing pressure of our work during the spring of 1918, caused me much weariness and distress."¹

On top of this the Czech colony in Paris was creating trouble. By now it had split up into various groups, one of which was suspected of acting in the Austrian interest. Well furnished with finance, this group used its means to help the Czech volunteers in the French Foreign Legion and at the same time to turn them against the National Council and against Dr Beneš in particular by suggesting that they and he were

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 375. -

deliberately keeping these 300 Czech troops in the Foreign Legion from joining the Czechoslovak army "as a release from what was nothing short of hell on earth." Dr Beneš in point of fact was arguing for months in a vain effort to persuade the French military authorities to release those legionaries for service with their own army; but the authorities steadily refused because they were afraid that if the request of one nation were granted other nations would want to be granted the same favour and thus break up the Foreign Legion. The following story will show what Dr Beneš had to contend with at this time:

"I here recall one of the saddest and most touching episodes of my life during the war. One morning, in the spring of 1918, at the time when this seditious agitation in the colony against me among the volunteers from the Foreign Legion had reached its height, I was visited by about eight of our volunteers, who were then serving their fourth year in the Foreign Legion. Their attitude was desperate and threatening. On the previous day they had been informed that within three days they would be sent to the trenches somewhere near Verdun, and they were afraid that this meant taking part in an attack which involved almost certain death. With mingled entreaties and menaces they called upon me to do everything in my power which would lead to their being transferred to our army. When they arrived, they were under the impression that I was opposed to this course. One of them, in his excitement, produced a hand-grenade, which he threatened to throw at my feet. Another bitterly reproached me for the treachery of which I had been guilty, and declared that they would refuse to obey orders. This agitated interview, which lasted for three hours, more than once assumed a dramatic character, but in the end they were entirely assuaged. I gave them an account of everything that I had done on behalf of the cause, and explained why success had not yet attended my efforts. I disposed of their mistaken conjectures, and made them understand that it was their duty to hold out, since by so doing they would render a great service to our cause. Within three days they went to the trenches in accordance with orders, but only one of them ever returned. He came to me a few days later in the Rue Bonaparte with a revolver and a bayonet with which he wanted to kill me. He was at once taken away to a military mental hospital. He had escaped death at the front only a short while before the attack, by behaving in such a deranged manner that he was regarded as being of unsound mind.

"Finally, however, we succeeded in getting our volunteers transferred from the Foreign Legion to our independent army, by which

process the number of our troops was increased and the greater part of our men were saved from the Legion. It cost me much work, and aroused a great deal of resentment against me."

In due course some 2000 volunteers, a high proportion of them being Slovaks, arrived from America, and finally the Italians consented to let 500 of the Czech troops organized in Italy go to France in order to complete the establishment of what was now a Czechoslovak Division of four regiments numbering 10,000 men. "By their presence on the Western front they enabled us to secure those diplomatic successes which the National Council in the summer of 1918. achieved for the nation.

"Štefánik had a great personal success in organizing the Czechoslovak army in Italy after the defeat of Caporetto had made the Italian military authorities a good deal more amenable, and in consequence of their support we were able to overcome the objections of the Consulta."

In July 1918 it was decided that General Janin, the Commander-in-Chief of the Czechoslovak army, should visit the Czechoslovak army in Siberia for the purpose of directing essential military operations and arranging for its transfer to the Western front. Štefánik, in spite of his bad health, decided to accompany him.

Let Dr Beneš sum up in his own words what was achieved:

"It was a remarkable exploit from a military and a human point of view, while in a political respect it was of great significance. In Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia our common soldiers had joined the Austro-Hungarian regiments, they had then passed over to the ranks of the Russians, and after severe hardships and sufferings the greater part of them, amid the chaos of revolution, had entered the improvised volunteer organizations, in which for some time they fought against the very people whom they had just left. Then, under the auspices of their great leader, they set out on their march across the vast spaces of Russia and Siberia; they occupied close upon 8000 kilometres of railway, little by little, fighting against all kinds of hostile forces, until at last, after traversing the entire globe, they might reach the Western front in Europe to take part in the battle for their nation's freedom. In many respects their story is a unique one, and while this long series of adventures and vicissitudes was in progress they improvised, not only the military organization, but also the economic and educational aspects of their legions. Their leaders were men who, though fundamentally non-military in their inclination, adapted themselves with the determination and energy of their race to the rigours of the situation.

"On the whole our troops may be taken as representing the chief features of the Czech national character. They exhibited its vitality, its perseverance, its common-sense methods of handling a situation, but at the same time its tendencies towards contentiousness and undue sensitiveness. This, incidentally, applies also to the majority of our troops in France and Italy."

And here is the brief epilogue of the months in France of alternate hope and disappointment, of encouragement in high places and obstruction by subordinate commands, and of ceaseless strain upon Dr Beneš's patient diplomacy exacted as much by disgruntled private soldiers as by generals and Ministers of State.

It is June 30th, 1918. The occasion is the presentation of colours to the 21st Regiment of Czechoslovak Infantry at Darnay.

The ceremony is attended by the President of the French Republic, by Ministers, military representatives of the Allies, representatives of the municipality of Paris, General Castelnau, and other high officers of the French army. A little man, only a month past his thirty-fourth birthday, is addressing the troops on behalf of the National Council. Three years ago on this date that little man was under police supervision in Prague. Two years ago on this date that little man was enjoying his first audience at the Quai d'Orsay with the political director, M. de Margerie, on the subject of Lieutenant (now General) Štefánik's visit to Russia. A year ago on this date that little man was discussing at the French Ministry of War the organization of a Czechoslovak army in France. Only yesterday that little man and his colleagues on the National Council had been overwhelmed to receive from M. Pichon, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, a formal declaration that the Government of the Republic would make its utmost efforts to fulfil Czechoslovak aspirations for independence within the historic frontiers of Czechoslovak territory. That little man, in his excitement, had read the words over and over again.

And now the President of the Republic stands hat in hand beside him and listens with grave attention to his address. In a few moments Poincaré himself will express "with equal clearness and emphasis" the attitude of the French Government towards an independent Czechoslovakia. "It is not surprising," Dr Beneš writes, "if I can still recall with emotion that memorable ceremony at Darnay on June 30th: the spectacle of our troops marching past the President, the Ministers and generals, and proclaiming their vow, the officers with drawn swords and the rank and file by raising the fingers of their right hand, that they would return home as free men or else die on the French battlefield."

CHAPTER X

ON April 2nd, 1918, Count Czernin, the Austrian Foreign Minister, made a speech to a delegation from the municipality of Vienna which is as notable an example of the destructive power of mere words as may be found in all history. The hour perhaps was seeming propitious to German hopes. The great offensive of March had not even yet lost all its momentum. Big Bertha, the new long-range gun, had just hit a Paris church on Good Friday and killed many of the congregation. The fanaticism of the Germanic belief in the efficacy of terror had been refreshed.

Czernin began his speech by an attack on the Czechoslovak movement abroad. He abused Masaryk by name, and went on to assert that, although such treacherous leaders existed both inside and outside the Empire, the Czech nation as a whole was loyal to Austria. After supplying the National Council with the very advertisement they needed to impress upon the Allied Governments the importance they had claimed for themselves as enemies of the Central Powers, Czernin went on to boast that Clemenceau had recently tried to start peace parleys with Vienna but that he, Czernin, had insisted upon the necessity for renouncing all claims to Alsace-Lorraine first. This the French had refused, and, therefore, no alternative was left except to carry the war to a victorious end.

Clemenceau retorted that it was Vienna, not Paris, who had sought to parley, and the controversy finished with the publication in facsimile of the Emperor Charles's letter to Prince Sixtus of Bourbon in which he had admitted the justice of France's claims to Alsace-Lorraine. Meanwhile, the Emperor had denied the authenticity of this letter in a telegram to the Kaiser. So now he stood arraigned before Europe as a timorous liar. For a day or two Czernin played with the notion of forcing the Emperor to abdicate; but in the upshot, twelve days after that fatal speech, it was Czernin himself who resigned. That resignation was followed by further humble commitments to the alliance between the two Empires. Even the most obstinate British and American believers in the possibility of separating them gave up hope. Mr Lloyd George and General Smuts woke up from their dream. The destruction of Austria-Hungary was now accepted as inevitable.

Dr Beneš, who had been playing a prominent part in the Congress

of Oppressed Nations held in Rome, returned to Paris and, with his infallible sense of the right moment for moving, asked Clemenceau for an audience. Clemenceau, as he had expected, was in the very mood to give assurances of support because Czernin's attack on the Czech movement was associated with what he regarded as the insult to himself. He told Beneš that personally he regarded the Czechoslovak question as settled, that he would recognize the National Council as a Government body, and that he was prepared to grant it the prerogatives of a Government, such as the recognition of diplomatic representatives, the right to issue passports, and the facilities for the granting of a loan. A month later the French Prime Minister received Dr Beneš again, repeated and amplified his promises, and indicated the right procedure with the various authorities to carry them into effect.

Czernin's attack on the treachery of Czechs abroad and promise of the loyalty of those at home were as useful to the cause of freedom within the confines of Austria-Hungary as they were without. A great demonstration convened by the Czech politicians in Prague heard a solemn vow made by the deputies not to give up the struggle until all the aims of various revolutionary manifestos had been achieved. What was even more gratifying to the National Council in Paris was the holding at St Martin of the first Slovak demonstration demanding self-determination for the geographically Hungarian branch of the Czechoslovak stock. On June 30th at Pittsburg, on the same day as the colours were presented to the 21st Regiment of Czechoslovak Infantry, Masaryk signed the Czechoslovak Convention between the Slovaks and Czechs of America, which, in the words of Masaryk,¹ "demanded for Slovakia an autonomous administration, a Diet and Courts of Law. I signed the Convention unhesitatingly as a local understanding between American Czechs and Slovaks upon the policy they were prepared to advocate. The other signatories were mainly American citizens, only ten of them being non-Americans, though further signatures were afterwards added without authorization. In the convention it was laid down that the details of the Slovak political problem would be settled by the legal representatives of the Slovak people themselves, just as I subsequently made it clear that our Declaration of Independence was only a sketch of the future Constitution, and that the Constitution itself would be finally determined by the legal representatives of the people. And so it was. The Constitution was adopted by the Slovaks as well as by the Czechs. The legal representatives of Slovakia thus expressed themselves in favour of complete union, and the oath

¹*The Making of a State*, p. 221.

sworn upon the Constitution binds the Slovaks, the Czechs, and me too."

What Masaryk calls "a small Slovak faction which was dreaming of God knows what sort of independence for Slovakia" later woke up to find it had achieved 'independence' in Hitler's European portmanteau.

After that memorable audience with Clemenceau on April 20th, 1918, Dr Beneš decided that the weather was promising for the ascent of Olympus, and on May 7th, having been authorized by Masaryk to carry on any negotiations that might be necessary with the British Government, he went to London.

On May 10th Dr Beneš was received by Mr Balfour, to whom, after he had been introduced by Mr Wickham Steed, he gave an account of the Czechoslovak movement abroad. Beneš did not ask for more than that the British Government would not oppose the policy of the other Allies over Czechoslovak affairs. He had the satisfaction of hearing that Mr Balfour himself advocated an anti-Austrian and anti-Hungarian policy, and he was invited to submit his memoranda in which he had explained the juridical position of the National Council and the significance of the military instructions signed by Clemenceau on February 7th.

Five days later Dr Beneš had an interview with Lord Robert Cecil on the subject of political recognition and the utilization of the Czechoslovak army. In the course of the discussion Beneš perceived that the British idea for the utilization of that army was to keep it in Siberia and fight the Bolsheviks with it rather than help to transport it to France.

What can now be called lunatic schemes for suppressing the Bolsheviks were epidemic at this date in Whitehall, and the formidable ignorance of Russia they displayed was imposed like a black-out upon public opinion in Great Britain until the country had crashed into another war for lack of light over a quarter of a century.

Dr Beneš returned to Paris on May 20th. Travelling at the same time was Brigadier-General C. Delmé-Radcliffe, Chief of the British Military Mission to the Italian Army in the Field, who was taking to the French Government Lord Robert Cecil's report on the subject of his negotiation with Beneš about the Czechoslovak army in Siberia, and by what Dr Beneš could learn from General Radcliffe a suggestion to use it to suit British plans was being put forward. At Southampton Dr Beneš was detained for a third time by the Passport Control and had to be rescued by Mr Wickham Steed, who told the officials that they would soon be examining and checking passports signed by this suspect spy. There is

something wild, in the Johnsonian use of the epithet, in the thought that a man in the position of Beneš proceeding from an important interview with the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain to another equally important interview with the Prime Minister of France could not be recognized for what he was even by underlings of the Passport Control. It is another aspect of the formidable ignorance which the British tolerate and even admire.

Clemenceau was emphatic next day on the subject of British egotism in the matter of the Czechoslovak army in Siberia.

"I want to have all your troops in France," he told Dr Beneš. "I consider them first-rate soldiers. We will give you a declaration and will acknowledge your independence. You must be independent because you deserve it. You can rely on me not to leave you in the lurch."

On June 3rd Mr Balfour wrote to Dr Beneš from the Foreign Office to say that His Majesty's Government would be "prepared to recognize the Czechoslovak movement in Allied countries and to recognize the Czechoslovak army as an organized unit operating in the Allied cause."

This was followed on July 1st by a telegram to the French Government in which the Foreign Office concurred with Pichon's Note of June 28th, which had so much encouraged the National Council. Nevertheless, Dr Beneš was still not satisfied. He wanted from Great Britain something definite and permanent. He wanted, in fact, a "decisive diplomatic document," which, from the point of view of international law, would denote the establishment of a State and Government of an independent nation—he wanted the Allies to negotiate *with* Czechoslovakia as an Allied nation at the Peace Conference, not *about* Czechoslovakia as a fragment of a shattered empire.

So in the last week of July 1918, when the desperate struggle which had lasted from that foggy March morning on which the British Fifth Army cracked under the weight of the great German offensive was beginning to take a definitely favourable turn, Dr Beneš decided that the moment had arrived to attempt his most difficult task. As he waited in Mr Balfour's anteroom at Downing Street upon that summer day, his mind went back to that summer of twelve years earlier when he had first visited London as a young student and after an initial disappointment had gradually become aware of the immense power of England and of the essential humanity by which that mighty egoism was tempered to achieve its mundane destiny. Pitt, Castlereagh,

Canning, Palmerston, Salisbury, Gladstone—how often in youth he had pondered upon their biographies, and in what an “impressive and alluring light” these great figures of statesmanship had appeared to him. Now in a minute or two he would be face to face with the present representative of that long line, he who twelve years ago had never dreamed that circumstances would determine so unexpected a propinquity. In this awe of his own position in Mr Balfour’s anteroom, on which he expends the longest personal reflection in the whole of that long volume of his war memoirs, we may discern an explanation of that serene English self-confidence which baffles the raw and resentful German self-assertiveness. Twenty years later it will be well to remember Dr Beneš’s emotions as he waited in Mr Balfour’s anteroom on that summer day in 1918. Only by doing so shall we appreciate the depth of Dr Beneš’s mortification; and it is indeed ironical that when as President of Czechoslovakia he was called upon to face one of the supreme crises in European history he should find that the representatives of that British statesmanship which had coloured his youthful imagination with such majestic and remote splendour were two middle-class business-men whose statesmanship hardly extended beyond their own experience of commercial accommodation.

However, the disillusionment caused by a Lord Runciman and a Neville Chamberlain was still far away when Dr Beneš paid his second visit to Mr Balfour in the last week of July 1918, and Mr Balfour then completely fulfilled his conception of what a British statesman ought to be. “It was a sheer joy to observe how Mr Balfour in moments of excitement, dispute, or heated argument, by his composure and by uttering a few words contrived to restore matters to their right proportion. He applied, so to speak, cold poultices to the heads of excited politicians, even when he revealed much human understanding of their conflicts and their agitation.”

It was the Cecil in Mr Balfour which appealed to Dr Beneš. Lord Robert Cecil had the same attraction for him.

“This man, who by many people in England was regarded as an unpractical or naive idealist, could, on occasion, by his intelligence and where need was, also by his understanding of exclusively British interests, show himself so excellent a tactician and so practical an advocate of his country’s welfare while maintaining his idealism, that often he seemed to me an excellent indication of how British politicians endeavour to make British statesmanship coincide with gentlemanly conduct.”

When one remembers the number of great European figures Dr

Beneš had met within less than three years after his escape from Prague the effect upon his mind of negotiating with Mr Balfour and Lord Robert Cecil is remarkable.

"From the first moment I approached these two statesmen with feelings of respect for the power and influence which they represented, but also with a complete frankness which placed me completely in their hands. I not alone had confidence in their honesty, but I was also a firm believer in their British political common sense."

With every word the shock that Munich must have been to him becomes more apparent.

When Dr Beneš put before Mr Balfour the aims of the National Council he realized at once that his demands were considered excessive. Mr Balfour did not see how it was possible to declare the National Council a Government and establish a State, the territory of which was occupied by the enemy to whom in international law and actual fact it still belonged. He could recall neither analogy nor precedent for such a case in history. Moreover, if Czechoslovakia secured recognition what about the Poles and the Yugoslavs? And the Rumanians? It was impossible to settle the Czechoslovak State as a separate item from the complicated problems of Central Europe. Finally Mr Balfour expressed his doubts how far the National Council really represented the opinion of the Czechoslovak nation and, therefore, how far it was legally qualified to become its Government. To this Dr Beneš responded that if about a hundred thousand Czechoslovak volunteer troops in the Allied countries accepted the National Council as their supreme authority surely that was sufficient testimony to its status. Mr Balfour was impressed by this argument.

For a fortnight the Foreign Office tried to avoid committing the British Government to too explicit a recognition of Czechoslovak claims and in draft after draft continued to avoid mentioning the words 'sovereignty,' 'State,' or 'Czechoslovak Government'; but whether Dr Beneš convinced Mr Balfour and Lord Robert Cecil or whether he simply wore them out by historical, juridical, and political arguments, or whether the argumentative support he received from distinguished and enthusiastic experts like Mr Wickham Steed and Dr Seton-Watson prevailed, in the end, probably due to a combination of all three, Mr Balfour surrendered. Yet even at the last moment there was a hitch because the British Government would not agree to accept the Czechoslovak National Council as an "interim Government" or even as "the basis of a future Government." It was Mr Steed who saved the situation by suggesting the use of the word 'trustee.' And so on August 9th, 1918,

the Declaration of the British Government was officially handed to Dr Beneš:

Since the beginning of the war the Czechoslovak nation has resisted the common enemy by every means in its power. The Czechoslovaks have constituted a considerable army, fighting on three different battlefields and attempting in Russia and Siberia to arrest the Germanic invasion.

In consideration of its efforts to achieve independence Great Britain regards the Czechoslovaks as an Allied nation, and recognizes the unity of the three Czechoslovak armies as an Allied and belligerent army waging regular warfare against Austria-Hungary and Germany.

Great Britain also recognizes the right of the Czechoslovak National Council as the supreme organ of the Czechoslovak national interests, and, as the present trustee of the future Czechoslovak Government, to exercise supreme authority over this Allied and belligerent army.

A. J. BALFOUR

Dr Beneš regards the negotiations which resulted in that Declaration as the most important political activity of the National Council during the war. That is another way of saying he regards it as his own outstanding achievement. He is right. It could very nearly be hailed as a miracle, and none of Dr Beneš's biographers seems to have grasped that those pages in which he relates the story of it kindle in the sophisticated the wonder of a supernatural experience which would be incredible if it were not so well authenticated. Even Masaryk seems to take it for granted and couples Beneš's feat with Asquith's consent to take the chair at his own inaugural lecture in London University.

Dr Beneš's bewitching of the Foreign Office caused a sensation at the time. The Marchese Imperiali, the Italian Ambassador at St James's, was so staggered by the Declaration that he called on Mr Balfour to ask whether the British Government realized the consequences of the arrangement with the Czechoslovak National Council.

"Yes," Mr Balfour replied, "we considered the matter for a long time. We hesitated before deciding to adopt this course. But there is no other possibility. This means the destruction of Austria-Hungary."

In Paris they were staggered too, and the only materialistic explanation they could find there was that the British Government had made a secret bargain with Beneš to use the army in Siberia for its own Imperial ends.

As soon as Dr Beneš got back to Paris on August 12th he was sent for by Clemenceau at the Ministry of War, and by Pichon and Berthelot at the Quai d'Orsay, to tell them the full story. They were duly gratified

when they heard that the Foreign Office had charged nothing for being bewitched, and the publication of the Declaration, which had been held up, was at once permitted.

The British Declaration became known in Vienna on August 24th at the moment when Burian, the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, was conferring with the Kaiser and his Ministers at Spa. It shed a gloom upon the conference, and an attempt was made to minimize its effect on public opinion in the Czech lands by publishing a special *communiqué*. This was the first time that the Government in Vienna had taken official notice of the National Council.

With his eye on the future of the army in Siberia, Dr Beneš now obtained a formal recognition of the National Council from the Japanese Government, when he found Masaryk's visit to Tokio on his way from Vladivostock to the United States of much help. Masaryk's triumph, however, was when, through his personal influence with President Wilson and the impression he had made on public opinion in the United States, Washington on September 2nd, 1918, published an even stronger declaration than London:

"The Czechoslovak peoples having taken up arms against the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, and having placed in the field organized armies, which are waging war against those Empires under officers of their own nationality and in accordance with the rules and practices of civilized nations, and Czechoslovaks having in the prosecution of their independence in the present war confined the supreme political authority to the Czechoslovak National Council, the Government of the United States recognizes that a state of belligerency exists between the Czechoslovaks thus organized and the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires.

"It also recognizes the Czechoslovak National Council as a *de facto* belligerent Government, clothed with proper authority to direct the military and political affairs of the Czechoslovaks.

"The Government of the United States further declares that it is prepared to enter formally into relations with the *de facto* Government thus recognized for the purpose of prosecuting the war against the common enemy, the Empires of Germany and Austria-Hungary."

Dr Beneš was already working hard to get the National Council transformed into an effective interim Government, and the result of his labour is best summarized in the telegram¹ he sent to Masaryk in Washington on September 13th, 1918. It is strange how that month of September recurs so fatefully in the life of Dr Beneš.

¹ *My War Memoirs*, pp. 420, 421.

"In consequence of negotiations carried out in Paris and London their Governments fully accept principle of complete recognition of our Government. I have made an agreement with Ministry of Foreign Affairs enabling us at once to organize our central administrative body the Czechoslovak Government, with regular diplomatic service. Seat of Government should be Paris, and we should have same status as Belgian Government with all advantages and entire public recognition internationally.

"I submit this matter to you with my personal opinion of these questions: In view of situation here it would be good to set up a Ministry under your presidency, with headquarters at Paris. It would be necessary to set up, beside the presidency of the ministerial council, also a Ministry of War and of Foreign Affairs. I do not know your opinion as to distribution of portfolios. I think that it will be essential to set up these three Ministries, and as regards the others we should keep to the opinion that they are to be given to political leaders from Bohemia.

"We could, in addition, set up State secretaries for finance and the interior.

"The Minister who might be in Paris in absence of the others could, for the interim, manage the remaining Ministries. It would also be necessary to establish legations at Rome, Paris, London, Washington, and Tokio, and also to appoint our representatives to the Serbian Government, with the title of *Chargé d'Affaires*, at least for the time being. . . . In view of situation I am compelled to begin making these new arrangements now. Considering the last declaration and the situation as a whole, I regard it as somewhat dangerous not to start without having our juridical status precisely defined, or without immediately transforming the National Council into a regular Government. I see from the Austrian papers that our people at home are reckoning upon this. Kindly let me have a telegraphic reply to all these questions, and inform me of your fundamental views. "BENEŠ"¹

Two days after this Burian, who at the Spa Conference on August 14th had declared that if the war lasted another two months Austria-Hungary could not survive, sent a Note not only to all the neutral States but also to his co-belligerents. He suggested an exchange of views about the basic principles for the discussion of peace. Hostilities would not be suspended: it would merely be a *rapprochement* to elucidate the points at issue with the object of speeding up negotiations for peace. The Allies rejected Burian's proposals contemptuously; they were

¹ *My War Memoirs*, pp. 420-421.

welcomed in Berlin, Sofia, and Constantinople. It is worth noting the terms in which Clemenceau replied. He assumed rightly that the Austrian offer was made in collusion with Berlin, and he took advantage of the opportunity to warn Germany that no mercy would be shown. He ended thus:

"Germany desired to enforce the end of the war by military power. Let her wish be therefore fulfilled. The most fearful account is tendered from nation to nation. It will be paid."

It had been wiser if Germany had heeded those words instead of ignominiously surrendering with belated lip-service to Wilson's Fourteen Points.

Fearful, indeed, was that account which was tendered, but not so fearful as the fresh account which mounted daily against the hour when Nemesis chose to tender it.

On September 26th Masaryk telegraphed through the Serbian Minister in Paris his complete approval of the scheme for constituting a Government.

Armed with this, Dr Beneš went ahead. Inasmuch as the Prime Minister of the new Government was in America, the Minister of War, General Štefánik, on his way to Siberia, and all the other members in Austria, the Minister for Foreign Affairs "acted with great care and consideration, but at the same time in a determined manner, such as is necessary at critical moments of this kind."¹

In other words, the Minister of Foreign Affairs combined in himself for a while the functions of all his colleagues. He wrote to Prague:

"Under no circumstances must there arise any dissension or such schism between us. Nor must there be one Government coming into existence here, and another Government among you. Whenever a Government is to come into existence in Bohemia, the step must be taken in agreement with us, and in continuity with us. . . . It is out of the question for the Allies to instigate any negotiations whatever with Austria-Hungary. This is an eventuality which need not be feared. Nor need there be any misgivings as to whether the Allies intend to fight to a finish. It would therefore be a suicidal policy on our part to make any arrangements with Austria. For these reasons we consider it essential for you, at the right moment (we do not wish to decide this, as you will be in a better position to judge), to refuse point-blank to enter Parliament, and also to break off all relations with Austria-Hungary. You would thus demonstrate that you understood what was meant when the Allies proclaimed us an Allied nation.

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 420.

"At the same time we urge you not to provoke the Germans or anybody else by a premature revolt. Any revolution which is to come, and for which you should be prepared and organized, must take place in agreement with us. The chief military move on the part of the Allies will not be made until the spring. By that time we shall be adequately organized, and as a Government we shall be able to reach a definite political and military agreement with the Allies on the subject of the plan for overthrowing Austria-Hungary by an external offensive and an internal revolution."¹

It was Dr Beneš's plan to arrange a solemn day for the proclamation of the State independence of Czechoslovakia, and for this he had fixed upon November 8th, 1918, the anniversary of the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620.

As soon as the French agreement was signed he went off to Italy on October 1st in order to secure the signature of a similar agreement there. On his way to Rome, his mind full of that solemn proclamation of the Czechoslovak State, he left the train, and from Verona he went up to visit the positions in the Alps occupied by the Czechoslovak troops. The experience moved him profoundly:

"Our cars passed through places where suddenly on the slopes there appeared hundreds of green uniforms and Italian hats with the red-white cockade. Further on we unexpectedly passed from the mountain defile into a broad cavity, above which, in an amphitheatre, were assembled about 2000 of our troops in a deluge of flags and waving hats. There was a long outburst of cheering, and I was then deeply moved as they intoned the strains of our national hymn, accompanied by the regimental band. The commander of the sector, having learned about my visit, had rapidly organized this touching celebration which, among these mountains at a height of several thousand feet, impressed me as few things have done in my life. I was greeted by several of those who had attended my university lectures. They were all filled with resolution and confidence, and they reminded me of the veiled suggestions which I had managed to embody in my lectures and which they had thoroughly understood.

"During these moments there passed through my mind the memory of all that had happened from 1914 until October 1918—*i.e.*, from the time when I had been creeping through the streets of Prague with treasonable documents in my pockets; when I had received messengers from Switzerland with suspicious luggage; when, as an outlaw, I had succeeded at the eleventh hour in escaping across the frontier; when

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 422.

I had begun my life of hardship in Paris, right up to that very moment when our national army were greeting me with songs and rifle salutes as a representative of our national Government, with a general of an Allied Great Power, and when, only a few miles away, the Austro-Hungarian military forces were awaiting an attack which was perhaps to have fatal consequences for them.”¹

While Dr Beneš was negotiating in Rome for an Italian agreement similar to the French agreement recognizing the new Czechoslovak Government, an alarming telegram from Dr Sychrava summoned him back to Paris. He left the negotiations in Rome unfinished and arrived on Sunday, October 13th, to find the “atmosphere charged with excitement.” It was feared that at the eleventh hour the Habsburg Empire might save itself by offering terms which President Wilson would accept. The postponement by the French Government of the Congress of Oppressed Nations which had been fixed for October 15th filled the members of the National Council with foreboding. French opinion was attributing this move to the influence of Great Britain, where Mr Lloyd George was suspected of trying to pull off a last-minute deal with Austria-Hungary at the expense of the Oppressed Nations. However, it was all a mare’s nest, and at the Quai d’Orsay Berthelot said to the agitated Czechoslovak Minister for Foreign Affairs:

“There can be no question whatever of any serious negotiations with Austria. The forces which have been let loose cannot be held up. Nothing can avert the downfall of the Central Powers; Austria is condemned to destruction and cannot be saved. Even if an attempt were made in one quarter or another at some sort of negotiations, it would merely be an insignificant intrigue. The elemental forces and fateful influences which are now at work can no longer be mastered by human beings.”

So Dr Beneš went ahead with the accrediting of his diplomatic representatives. It must have given him particular pleasure to appoint Dr Sychrava first Czechoslovak Minister in Paris.

The manifesto of the Emperor Charles offering federal autonomy to the nations of the Empire drew from President Wilson through the State Department the cold verdict that it was too late. One of his Fourteen Points had been: “The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.” Since then the Government of the United States had recognized a state of belligerency existing between the Czechoslovaks and the German and

¹ *My War Memoirs*, pp. 428, 429.

Austro-Hungarian Empires, and that the Czechoslovak National Council was a *de facto* belligerent Government, clothed with proper authority to direct the military and political affairs of the Czechoslovaks. "The President is therefore no longer at liberty to accept a mere 'autonomy' of these peoples as a basis of peace, but is obliged to insist that they, and not he, shall be the judge of what action on the part of the Austro-Hungarian Government will satisfy their aspirations and their conception of their right and destiny as members of the family of nations."

That Note goes some way to dispose of the claim echoed and re-echoed by German propaganda *ad nauseam* ever since Versailles that they were tricked into signing the Armistice over those Fourteen Points.

For the rest of that October Dr Beneš was receiving acknowledgments of the Government in which he was Foreign Minister from the other Allied Governments and accrediting to them diplomatic representatives. Yet even although the early collapse of Austria-Hungary was expected, neither Dr Beneš nor anybody else in Paris anticipated the early collapse of Germany. As late as October 26th he was discussing with Marshal Foch the most effective use of the Czechoslovak troops in the great offensive planned for the spring of 1919.

The only indulgence Dr Beneš allowed himself as Minister for Foreign Affairs was a beard. It was not a successful beard. Mr Harold Nicolson, in that most impressive book¹ of his about Versailles, called it "a silly little imperial." Actually it was not an imperial; it was a sort of nursery-garden beard which in time might develop into one of those trim but luxuriant French official beards he must often have envied when he first arrived in Paris to build up a State. It may be significant that soon after Mme Beneš arrived in Paris from Prague, where she had suffered so much, the beard vanished, and has never been seen again.

¹ *Peacemaking*, 1919 (Constable, 1933).

CHAPTER XI

ON October 23rd, 1918, the Paris newspapers published what seemed the incredible announcement that the Vienna Government had granted permission to the leading Czech politicians to get in touch with members of the Provisional Czechoslovak Government abroad. Nevertheless, this last desperate attempt to save the Habsburg Empire by a federal resolution, which it was hoped in Vienna the Czechs at home would support, was true. Dr Kramář, Dr Šámal, and other delegates reached Geneva on October 26th, where, on October 28th, Dr Beneš joined them.

It is clear by reading between the lines in Dr Beneš's account of this Geneva Conference that the Czech delegates had gradually to be brought round to a realization of the magnitude of the achievement accomplished by Masaryk, himself, and Štefánik, by the troops, and by the National Council. They could not be blamed for this. Communications with Prague for the last three years had been slow, uncertain, and necessarily as brief as possible. Deeply moved by the full story, the Prague delegates decided to place on record in the name of the nation their appreciation of what had been done, and this manifesto was handed to Dr Beneš with the request that the contents of it should be conveyed at a suitable moment to all those whom it was intended to honour and thank.

While the Conference at Geneva was discussing the theoretical constitution, economy, and administration of the future Czechoslovak State, in an atmosphere of somewhat academic remoteness from reality if we may judge by Dr Kramář's suggestion that a democratic throne should be offered to one of the Russian Grand Dukes, the military collapse of the Habsburg Empire on the Italian front precipitated events in Prague. On October 27th Bohemian Germans had gone to Dresden in order to enlist German help should revolution break out in Bohemia. Coming events——

On the night of the 27th a telephone message from the Piave front informed Dr Rašín in Prague that the military situation was hopeless, and Rašín at once made arrangements with Dr Scheiner, Chairman of the Sokols, because next day "things were going to happen."

So on the same day as the Foreign Minister of the provisional Czechoslovak Government arrived at Geneva the National Committee in Prague proclaimed that the independent Czechoslovak State had

come into being and called upon the people to maintain order and show themselves worthy of the freedom which had crowned their efforts. The scope of this book does not allow a detailed account of events in the Czech lands during those fateful few days, when stone after stone crashed through the stained-glass window of the Habsburg Empire. Two events, however, must be noted. On October 29th the Germans in Bohemia constituted "Deutschböhmen" and "Sudetenland" and on the following day the Austrian National Assembly passed a resolution making "Sudetenland"¹ a constituent part of a new German Austria, thus indicating the popular German belief that the German people can lose a war and win it, as difficult a feat for ordinary mortals as to eat a cake and have it. The second event is that on October 30th, by a declaration made at Turčianský St Martin, the whole of Slovakia formally associated itself with Czechoslovak national and State unity.

Dr Beneš, with his infallible instinct for what is practically important, was dancing with impatience at Geneva while the incomplete reports of what was happening in Vienna, Budapest, Prague, and elsewhere in that Imperial crash were appearing in the papers. He knew that it was vital for him to get back to Paris so that the Czechoslovak case would not be prejudiced for lack of representation at any Allied discussion of the armistice with Austria-Hungary, which was obviously imminent. As it was, he did not reach Paris until November 1st, and the first Allied discussions about the Austro-Hungarian Armistice had begun at Versailles the day before. Next morning he was at the Quai d'Orsay to ask why no Czechoslovak representative had been invited to the conference in view of the express stipulation in the agreements with France and Great Britain that Czechoslovakia was to take part in all Allied conferences when the interests of the new State were involved. He made it clear to Berthelot that the absence of a Czechoslovak representative would create a most unfavourable impression in Bohemia and might, indeed, produce extremely unpleasant repercussions for the Allies. Berthelot telephoned to the Rue Bonaparte after the disappointed Czechoslovak Foreign Minister had returned, giving him an official invitation to attend the meeting of the Great Powers at 11 o'clock that morning in the residence of Colonel House. This was a supplementary meeting held every morning before the proceedings of the main Conference, to which various authorities were co-opted.

¹ This is the first that was heard of Sudetenland, which is an imaginary land like Ruritania.

Then on November 4th a special messenger from the Quai d'Orsay arrived at 18 Rue Bonaparte with an official invitation from the French Minister for Foreign Affairs for Dr Edvard Beneš to attend the plenary meeting of the Supreme War Council, which was to be held at Versailles that afternoon.

"I must confess that I was highly excited,"¹ he writes, "when on that afternoon of November 4th I took my seat in a motor-car decorated with our flag, and drove through Paris . . . to Versailles. When for the first time I entered the hall at Versailles where all the mighty of this world were assembled—mighty especially at that moment when they were settling the destiny of three Empires in Europe and Asia—and when I took my seat besides Vesnič and Venizelos, I could scarcely believe in the reality of what was happening. Three years previously I had escaped across the frontiers of Bohemia, crawling through the thickets to avoid being seen by the Austrian and Bavarian gendarmes, and staking the whole future on what destiny might bring. Now I was sitting in conference with the representatives of France, Great Britain, United States, Italy, Japan, Serbia, Greece, Belgium, and Portugal, to decide with them as to the fate of the Empires of Wilhelm and Karl, and to sign the terms of their capitulation."

That Czechoslovakia alone of the Succession States was able to participate in the Armistice negotiations was due to Dr Beneš's determination and the affection (affection is not too strong a word) he was able to win from "the mighty of the world." There was only one thing which prevented Poland, the Yugoslavs outside Serbia, and Rumania from being represented: they had no Beneš. It was suitable that Dr Beneš should sit next to Venizelos at that first plenary meeting of the Supreme War Council; they were men of comparable metal.

Lloyd George in *The Truth about the Peace Treaties* showed a curious failure to grasp the *raison d'être* of the Czechoslovak Republic, a wanton obliviousness of the part he himself played in its creation, or a convenient, if somewhat pusillanimous, repentance for that part to suit the pusillanimous mood of 1938. Beneš, he wrote, "either ignored or minimized the fact that he was claiming the incorporation in the Czechoslovak Republic of races which on the principle of self-determination would have elected to join other States."

In other words, Wilson, Clemenceau, Orlando, and Lloyd George himself were deceived by a young man of thirty-four into accepting a State they supposed to be racially something entirely different from what it was. Are we invited to believe that if the German minority

¹*My War Memoirs*, p. 460.

in Bohemia and Moravia had been allowed to join a German Austria, and if that German Austria had been allowed to join the Weimar Republic, Hitler would never have come to power and Germany would have been content? Are we to believe that if the Magyars had been allowed to retain Slovakia the Iron Crown of St Stephen would never have been offered to Lord Rothermere and that Hungary would have been content? It strains credulity too far. The *raison d'être* of Czechoslovakia was to create a democratic substitute for what Lloyd George himself had called the "ramshackle" Habsburg Empire in the heart of Central Europe which might serve as a nodus of an ultimately extended Danubian federation. When Lloyd George writes as naively as above the well-informed reader asks if his concept of a strong Greece was merely the result of the persuasiveness and plausibility of Venizelos; but it is right to credit Lloyd George with a large vision of his own and to remember that his memory is honoured in Greece for his wisdom, not for his fallibility.

It is perfectly clear that the recognition of Czechoslovakia was accorded by the Allies before Austria-Hungary sued for an armistice. Mr Balfour could not have signed that Declaration on August 9th, 1918, without Lloyd George's consent. Pichon could not have signed the French Agreement of September 28th, 1918, without Clemenceau's consent. Masaryk could not have proclaimed the independence of Czechoslovakia in Washington on October 18th, 1918, without President Wilson's consent. Czechoslovakia was represented at the Supreme War Council because Dr Beneš had secured for the new State a juridical basis. The *coup d'état* in Prague had no influence on the course events took at the Armistice Conference. The discussions always kept in view the possibility that both Austria and Germany would refuse armistice terms of such severity and that hostilities might be resumed. In that case it was Marshal Foch's strategic plan to concentrate strong forces in Bohemia and attack Germany from the south.

He discussed this plan with Dr Beneš and expressed his intention to use the Czechoslovak army. We are all agreed now that the armistice with Germany was in fact a grave misfortune, and that only the final rout of the German army and a subsequent occupation of all Germany would have convinced the obstinate self-delusion of the German people that they had been conquered on the field of battle. In a minor degree the same can be said of the Germans in Bohemia. They should have been offered the evidence of the German defeat at the hands of the Czechs they affected to despise.

It was to those soldiers that Dr Beneš betook himself from Paris in order to celebrate this freedom-crowned anniversary of Bílá Hora—the Battle of the White Mountain. That 21st Regiment in General Goureaud's 4th Army had already glorified those colours they were given by Poincaré on that June day. That regiment and the 22nd had been cited in an Order of the Day for their fighting on October 19th-25th near Vouziers.

"Resolute in attack, stubborn in defence, unwavering in the severe artillery fire, they brilliantly proved themselves equal to the tasks entrusted to them and satisfied their leader in every respect."

General Goureaud's headquarters were in a solitary house near Vouziers which but a short while back had housed the Kaiser during the last desperate attempt by his armies to reach Paris. The Lion of the Argonne had invited Dr Beneš and Major Fierlinger, his chief military assistant, to a lunch at which his staff and a number of Czechoslovak officers were present. No General whom the present writer has had the honour of meeting left on his mind such an impression of military virtue and human worth as General Goureaud, and the grave, bearded figure whose arm had been lost just after such another lunch in an old Gallipoli fort to celebrate the entry of Italy into the war in May 1915 was the very man to give this occasion "a sense of solemnity." In that deep, harmonious voice of his he spoke on this November day of Bílá Hora, of the Czechoslovak struggle for national independence, of defeat three centuries ago and victory now on three fronts. He said that the servitude of a nation through three hundred years was over and that the great success won by the Czechoslovak troops under his command would be a bond of friendship between France and Czechoslovakia. Here in this house only a short time ago the Kaiser had helped to direct the operations which were to bring about the fall of Paris. To-day he was welcoming a Czechoslovak Minister who had come to greet his fellow-countrymen fighting to help in the liberation of France and thus also of their own country. It was a manifesto of victory, the terms of which would be handed by Allied Commanders-in-Chief perhaps to-day, perhaps to-morrow, or perhaps the day after, to the defeated Kaiser.

"Three centuries of your servitude are avenged," General Goureaud concluded.

Dr Beneš replied to the General's speech with emotion as he saw through the windows "the gloom of the devastated fields and reflected what hecatombs had been sacrificed, and how strange was the logic of events. The anniversary of Bílá Hora!"



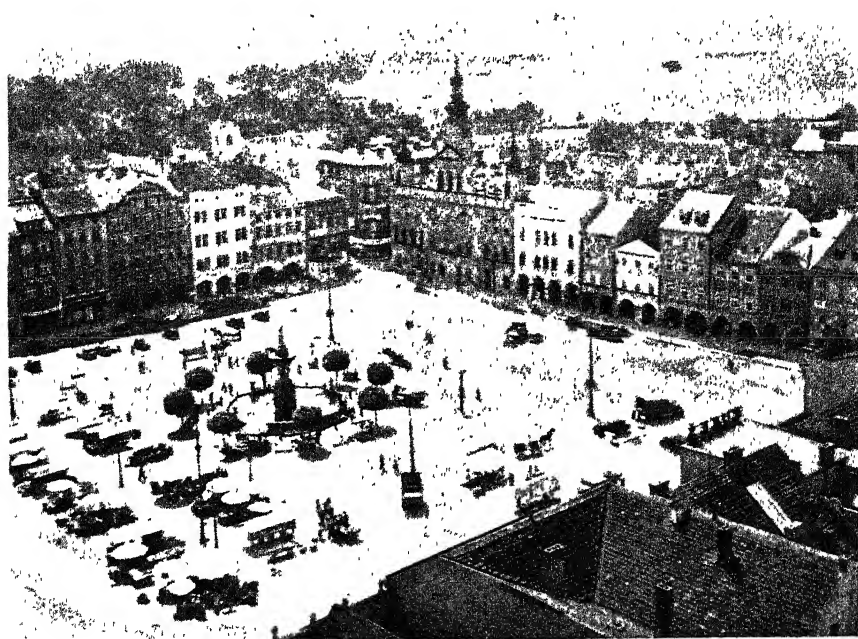
NEAT LITTLE TOWNS DOT THE COUNTRYSIDE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Rural and industrial elements are well balanced, leaving the beauty of the countryside unimpaired. This is the town and castle of Spiš, in Slovakia.



ZLÍN, IN NORTHERN MORAVIA

The country's main shoe-manufacturing centre, notable for well-planned community life in an industrial area.



ČESKÉ BUDĚJOVICE, IN SOUTH BOHEMIA

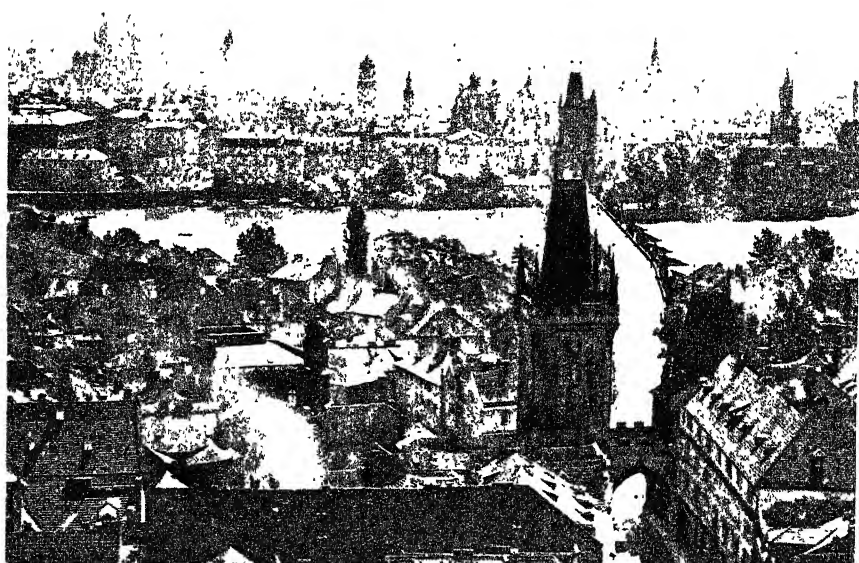
An ancient and important centre of an agricultural and industrial district.



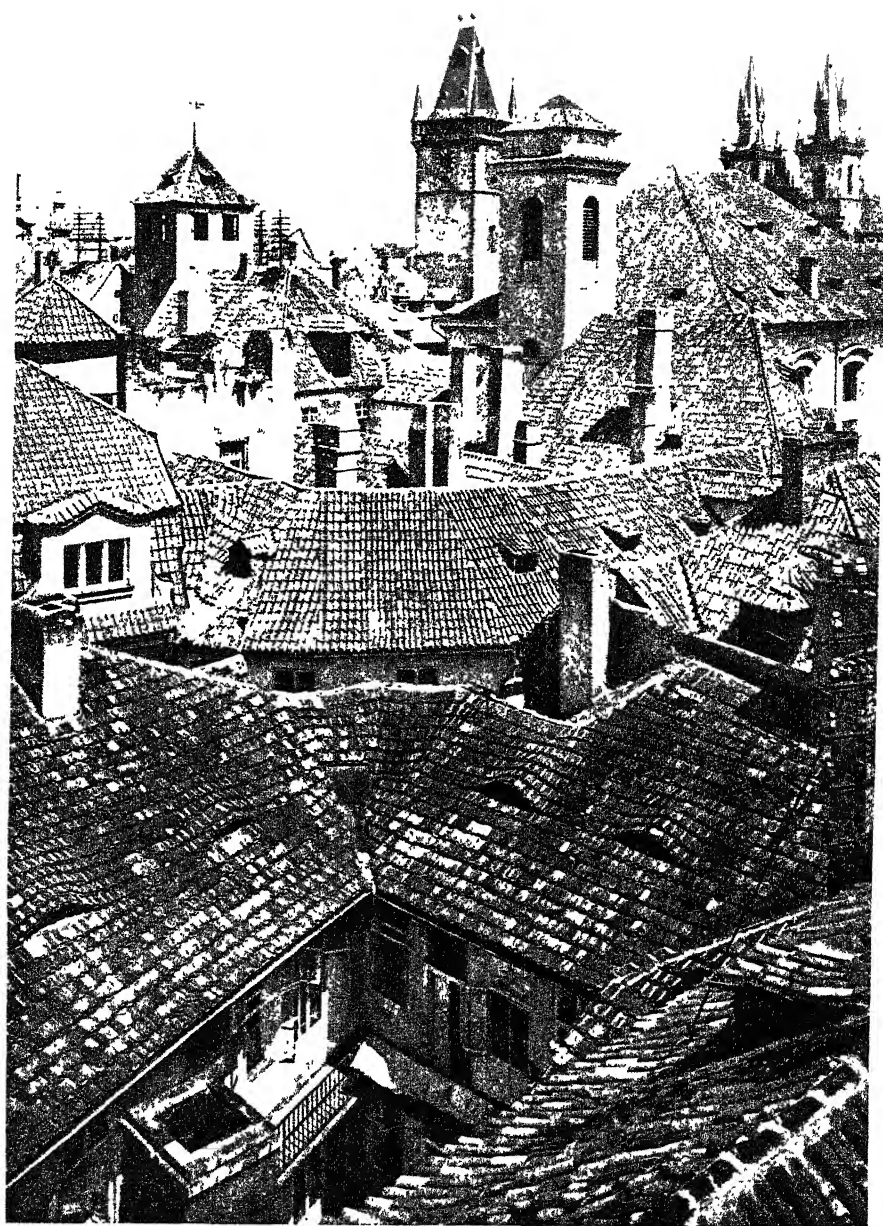
THE CHURCH AT ZVOLEŇ, SLOVAKIA
A traditional church in a busy provincial town.



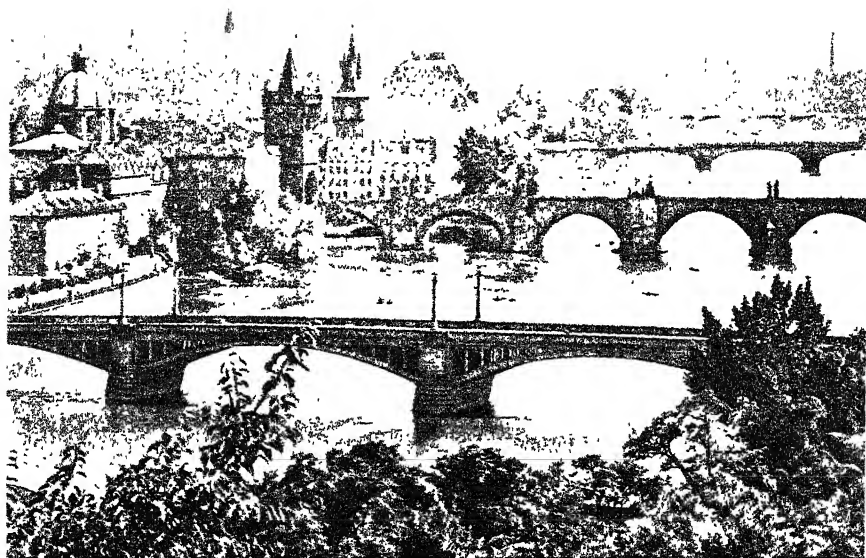
PRAGUE
A view from the arches of the St Vitus Dome.



PRAGUE
City of a hundred spires.



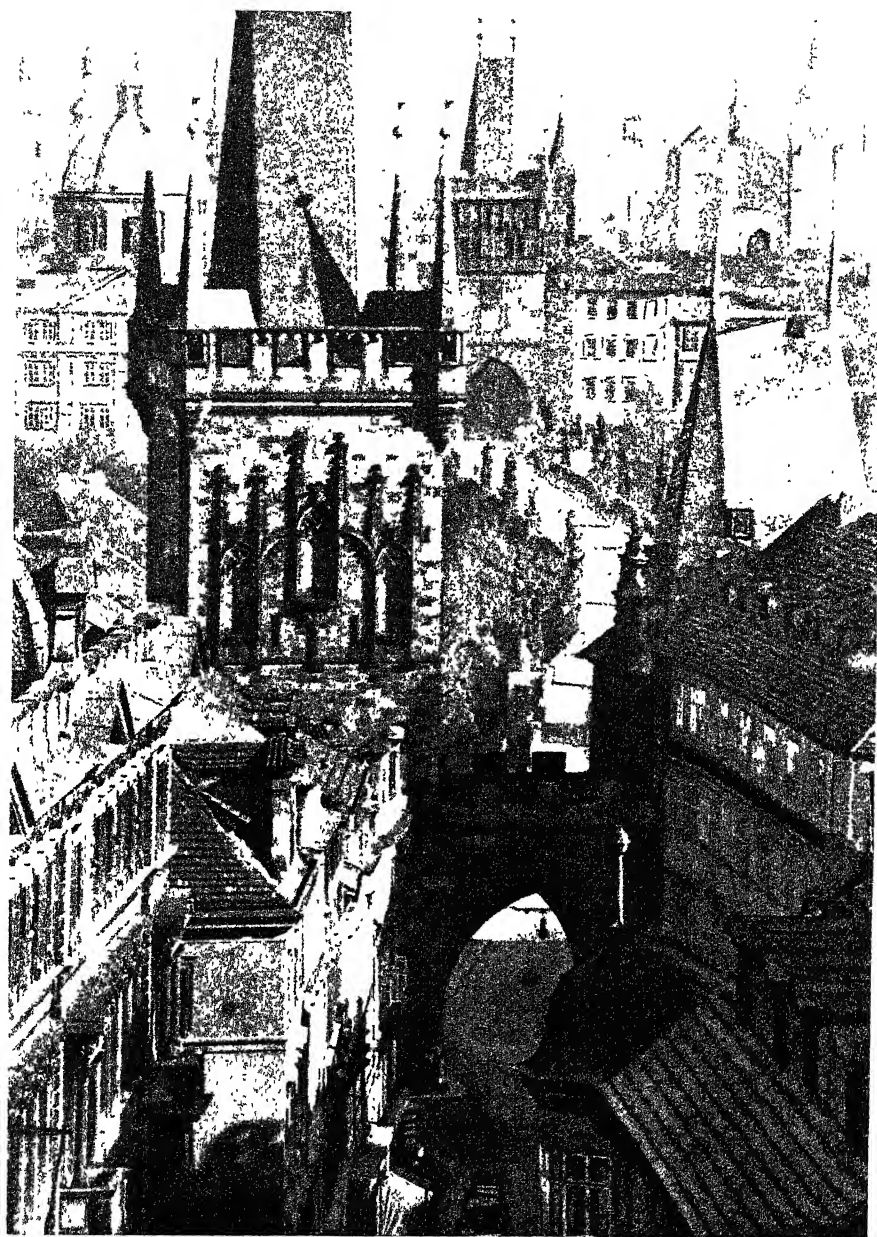
PRAGUE
A view across old roofs.



PRAGUE
· Bridges across the river Vltava.



PRAGUE
St Wenceslas Square, the capital's main street.



PRAGUE
Medieval towers.



PRAGUE

Hradčany Castle, the ancient royal residence, and now the home of Czechoslovakia's President.

After lunch he rode out to inspect the troops and found them drawn up in a hollow square. He conveyed to them those thanks which were recorded by the Prague delegates at Geneva, and informed them briefly what had been discussed and decided there about the future of their country. Then he told them about the Armistice negotiations at Versailles and of the *coup d'état* at Prague. "In accordance with an Allied resolution," he announced, "you are going back to your own country to be prepared, if necessary, to continue the military operations there."

When the issue was still uncertain Dr Beneš had planned to proclaim at the front a Provisional Government on this anniversary, but, as he says, "we already had achieved far more than this: a Government, the overthrow of the old regime at home, the downfall of the Empire and the dynasty, the approaching capitulation of Germany, the prospect of a return at an early date."

As was to be expected, where so many interests were concerned to undermine the authority of the National Council, stories soon began to reach Paris of opposition to it in Prague. Dr Beneš was able to counteract these by his report of the complete agreement reached at Geneva, but he was anxious to lose no time in giving practical effect to the decisions then made. He pressed upon the French military authorities the urgency of transporting to their own country all the Czechoslovak troops serving in France and Italy, and with the approval of Dr Kramář, who was acting as Prime Minister and also as Masaryk's deputy, he arranged for the despatch of a French military mission to Prague to organize the new State's future army. With consummate tact and foresight he made a new military agreement by which Marshal Foch should remain Commander-in-Chief of the Czechoslovak armies on all fronts. This was formally signed in February 1919. What was even more vital, if the new State was to survive the convulsions which accompanied the emergence of a new Central Europe, was the need of getting food supplies to the new State, and he entered into negotiations with the Americans in Paris, who under Mr Hoover were making themselves responsible for the problem of feeding the populations stricken by four years of war. The Americans stipulated that the Czechoslovaks should help the Germans and Austrians wherever there was a risk of Bolshevism, and Dr Beneš was only too glad to give assurances on this point. He desired as much tranquillity in Vienna and elsewhere as it was possible to secure.

The politicians in Prague were still under the influence of the surprise with which the achievements of the National Council had struck them in Geneva and co-operation was unstinted. Dr Kramář was anxious

that Masaryk should return as soon as possible so that his wisdom and authority might unite divergent opinion and give a sane direction to social constructiveness.

The National Assembly of the new State was convened on November 14th in the building previously used by the Diet. 249 delegates attended, representing seven political parties according to the numerical strength of each, to which were added forty Slovak members. The Germans refused to send delegates. Dr Kramář opened the National Assembly with an inaugural address, in which he declared Czechoslovakia to be a free democratic Republic. He welcomed the Slovaks and offered national equality to the Germans. Then he proposed T. G. Masaryk as the first President of the Republic, and with immense and unanimous enthusiasm the Liberator was elected. Other State officials were elected, and the Vice-President of the National Assembly, Bela, speaking for the Slovaks, declared that they desired liberty which was neither Slovak nor Magyar, but Czechoslovak.

The unanimity and practical orderliness of these proceedings made a most favourable impression on Allied opinion. At this date there was chaos in Austria and Hungary. The Government in Belgrade was still arguing with the Zagreb National Committee. The Government in Warsaw was at odds with the Polish National Committee in Paris. Dr Beneš, who on his return from Geneva had forecast in detail what would happen in Prague, found his optimism completely justified and his own position greatly strengthened in the high political circles of the Allies bewildered by the mutually contradictory claims of intransigent nationals.

It was as well for Dr Beneš that his reputation for accuracy and political sagacity did stand so high because almost immediately he was faced by a tricky diplomatic puzzle—indeed, by what for some time threatened to be an impasse.

Much less than justice has been done, particularly by his own countrymen, to Count Karolyi's last minute attempt to save Hungary from the disastrous results of the egomaniac policy which had been followed ever since the Dual Monarchy was proclaimed in 1867. The Magyars appear as romantic, cultivated, and attractive people to everybody except those members of other nations who have had the misfortune to be ruled by them. They captivated the heart of Lord Rothermere as a handsome actor captivates the hearts of an audience. The sporting propensities of the Magyar nobility are regarded with respect by English gentlemen. The dismemberment of Hungary by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 has been held up to execration as a crime

against international morality. Before the First World War the population of Hungary was 54 per cent. Magyar and 45 per cent. non-Magyar. By the Treaty of Trianon the population of Hungary became almost completely Magyar, and in the non-Magyar lands of Hungary taken from it there were included a Magyar population perhaps as high as 15 per cent. If the Magyars had treated their own minorities with the slightest consideration they would not have earned the hatred of Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Slovenes, Serbians, Ruthenians, and Rumanians: it is significant that of the races incorporated in the Dual Monarchy the Poles alone did not hate the Magyars, and there were no Poles in Hungary.

Károlyi was a nobleman with liberal ideas, who seized the helm when the Magyar ship looked like foundering, and, aware of the long ruthless process of Magyarization which had made his countrymen, Catholic and Protestant alike, detested in Central Europe more bitterly than the Germans, tried to improvise amid the confusion a policy of racial justice. As early as October 25th, 1918, his revolutionary National Council had proclaimed autonomy for Slovaks, Ruthenians, and Rumanians with Ministers to represent them in the Hungarian Parliament. On top of this he began to negotiate for a separate armistice with General Franchet d'Espérey, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the East, his immediate object being to prevent a Serbian invasion of Hungary. As a result this separate armistice was signed on November 13th. Inasmuch as the Armistice terms for the whole Habsburg Empire had been already settled at Versailles and signed on the Italian front in the name of the whole Empire on November 3rd, this separate armistice was irregular and should have been superfluous. That it was allowed to be concluded was due to the anxiety of the Supreme War Council to avoid military complications. Clemenceau assured Beneš by telegram that such an armistice would not prejudice any political decisions in the future. Yet by article 17 it was stipulated that for the time being all Hungarian territory except Croatia-Slavonia was to be left under the administration of the local Magyar authorities. Was Croatia-Slavonia the nearest military intelligence could get to Czechoslovakia? Nobody knows to this day.

Meanwhile, on the initiative of Dr Šrobár, himself a Slovak, small garrisons of irregular troops supported by Sokols had occupied various local areas in Slovakia, and on November 4th and 9th a mixed force of Czechoslovak troops and gendarmes to the number of 1100 extended the occupation. On November 10th the Magyars mobilized two Divisions and drove back the small Czechoslovak detachments to the

Moravian frontier. The Prague Government was much alarmed by the turn events had taken and appealed for regular troops. Dr Beneš tried to hurry up the transport of the Czechoslovak regiments in France and Italy, but to no purpose. However, if he could not overcome military inertia he knew how to stir up the Quai d'Orsay. Karolyi had sent a Note to Prague on November 17th, protesting against the occupation of Slovakia. Kramář replied that the Czechoslovak State had been recognized by the Allies before the change of regime in Hungary and asked Beneš to intervene in Paris. The second half of November was spent by Beneš in daily discussions with the political and military authorities, and finally he drove the former into admitting that the Belgrade armistice was a military blunder. Beneš, having extracted this admission, demanded that the blunder should be rectified, and after a good deal of hesitation the Quai d'Orsay agreed. Beneš then enlisted the help of Marshal Foch, who suggested he should settle a line of demarcation behind which the Magyars would be compelled to withdraw. Dr Beneš's report was sent on November 25th, and two days later he received a reply from M. Pichon.

"In your letter of November 25th you drew my attention to the conclusions arising from the Armistice negotiated with Count Karolyi on November 13th, and running counter to the Armistice with Austria-Hungary which the Allies signed on November 3rd.

"In view of the fact that Count Karolyi wished to draw incorrect conclusions from this document . . . I have the honour to inform you that the Minister of War has just sent precise telegraphic instructions on this matter to the Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Allied Armies.

"In confidence I may mention that these instructions provide for the immediate withdrawal of the Magyar troops from the territory occupied by them without authorization."¹

One might have supposed that the matter would now have been settled: but on November 27th the first Allied Military Mission, directed by Lieut.-Col Vyx, arrived in Budapest, and two days later Colonel Vyx informed Dr Milan Hodža, the Czechoslovak delegate there, that the occupation of Slovakia violated the terms of the Belgrade armistice, and that the action by the Prague authorities would damage their cause at the Peace Conference. However, a day or two later Colonel Vyx received his instructions from the Ministry of War and ordered the Magyar Government to withdraw its troops from Slovak territory. Unfortunately the Ministry of War had omitted to say what was Slovak

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 477.

territory, and Dr Hodža telegraphed to Dr Beneš to urge him to obtain further instructions. Beneš, who had presumed that his line of demarcation had been accepted, urged the Quai d'Orsay to send positive instructions in that sense to Budapest, but meanwhile, on December 6th, Dr Hodža had agreed with Bartha, the Magyar Minister of War, to establish a provisional line of demarcation pending the arrival of instructions from Paris, and this agreement was reported to Colonel Vyx, who passed it on to Paris. Beneš was told nothing about this agreement, which complicated matters considerably.

The Americans now took a hand, and sent an official demand to Dr Beneš that no negotiations should be undertaken by the Czechoslovak Government with Vienna or Budapest or Berlin. The repercussions of this unfortunate arrangement between Hodža and Bartha extended to the Quai d'Orsay and the French Ministry of War, who scolded Dr Beneš for making territorial arrangements (of which he had no notification from Prague or Budapest) with the Magyars over the heads of the Allies, and, presumably to punish him, began to object to his line of demarcation, which they had already sanctioned, because Karolyi was arguing that a line which corresponded approximately to the legitimate demands of both sides had been arranged between him and the Czechoslovak representative, for which reason he did not see his way to evacuate as far as the Beneš line.

The imbroglio continued until at last, after "wearisome and vexatious" negotiations at the Quai d'Orsay, Beneš secured his line, which was denounced by the Magyar Government as a "brutal and arbitrary act." Dr Beneš pays a tribute to the skill with which Karolyi handled his case, and we can pay a tribute to the masterly fashion in which Dr Beneš sustained his. It is not too much to say that he won the peace for his country before the long battle of Versailles started.

On December 13th the Austrians continued what the Magyars had begun when Bauer, the Foreign Minister, protested against the attempt to retain the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia, and demanded a plebiscite. Three days later he urged that the frontiers of Austria with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia should be settled by a special process of arbitration. The inability to grasp that a lost war of aggression must cost the losers something is already apparent. Dr Beneš argued that the menace of economic chaos made it imperative to accept, at any rate provisionally, the historic frontiers of Bohemia, and fortunately he was able to deal first with the logical French, which drew from the Quai d'Orsay the following unequivocal statement:

"The French Government takes the view that the Czechoslovak State,

in accordance with the recognition granted to it by the Allied Governments, must have as its frontiers, until the decision of the Peace Conference, the existing frontiers of the historical provinces of Bohemia, Moravia and Austrian Silesia."

The British dislike of any unequivocal statement made them sticky for a while, but in the end they accepted the French point of view. The Americans were even stickier. They were already equipped with a posse of geographical, ethnological, and historical experts, and were disinclined to commit themselves to any statement which might savour of prejudging the issue. They were nervous about setting precedents to the Poles in the matter of historical frontiers; but they were at last persuaded to accept the French point of view when Dr Beneš pledged the Czechoslovak Government's unconditional acceptance of the Peace Conference's decision as final.

President Masaryk left New York on November 20th and after spending some days in England reached Paris by December 7th. He and Beneš had not met for over eighteen months. The President was anxious about the future. He foresaw that the task of "elaborating the State at home" was likely to be more arduous than the struggle to create it. When the younger man reminded him of the prestige and popularity that would make everything possible "he only made a deprecatory gesture with his hand and remarked: 'We shall see.'"

Masaryk gave Beneš advice about preparing for his own return—told the younger man that he considered him as his successor in the Presidency and enlarged upon his ideas for his political future. "To this I said nothing: the matter was still new to me, and I had not given any thought to my political future. I had always merely fulfilled my duty, and work which creates, work which challenges, has always been my element."¹

Unless I have completely failed to suggest the passionate devotion of my subject to getting things done with the minimum of delay and the maximum of effectiveness it should be obvious that Dr Beneš is a man entirely unswayed by personal ambition, utterly incapable of self-glorification. It was charged against Venizelos that he exulted in power for power's sake: no doubt there are many who make the same charge against Dr Beneš. Venizelos was driven into asserting himself by the obstinacy, jealousy, and vanity of his inferiors in statecraft. When he grew old the strain of a lifelong struggle against factiousness told upon his resilience, and he was inclined to despair of ever amortizing the interminable vendetta which as these words are written still

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 286.

survives in Hellenic politics. Therefore he became more and more unsusceptible to compromise on account of his own disheartening experience of compromise. In his younger days no statesman was more tolerant of his opponents, more supple with attempted accommodation, more selfless in sacrificing his own bounteous optimism to avoid leaping ahead of less audacious associates. His patience, indeed, seemed inexhaustible, and no evidence worthy of attention exists to show that he ever surrendered to personal ambition what belonged to his country. I enjoyed exceptional opportunities of observing the political methods of Venizelos with a most intimate knowledge of every personality that played a part in one act of his life's drama. I have not enjoyed such an opportunity in the case of Dr Beneš. I have observed enough, however, to be able to recognize a comparable approach to politics in the two statesmen, and I have no hesitation in affirming that Dr Beneš is the only living European statesman who can be allowed metal of such calibre as Venizelos.

To anticipate for a moment, I asked Dr Beneš in the spring of 1944 how he expected to be received by the people of Czechoslovakia when he returned to his country. "For three to six months very well," he replied. "Then it will probably go as it went after the last war, and the criticism will begin. If the sun is too hot Beneš will be blamed. If the harvest is bad Beneš will be responsible. And so on. After some three to six months there will be a new Presidential election. If I am again elected President it will have to be without any wish on my part for the honour. I will not accept the honour unless I understand clearly that it is the wish of the whole country. I will be content to continue with my own work. I have a great deal to write. I will be happy."

I shall not pretend to believe that Dr Beneš is so inhuman that he would have been untouched by the evidence of his country's affection for him, but I do believe that if his country had decided to elect another President he *would* have been completely unhurt by it. He would have accepted the verdict without a twinge of disappointment or regret. Work which creates, work which challenges, has in very truth always been his element, and if one day he will devote his feverishly industrious life to extending his memoirs of the First World War to a history of Europe from 1918 until he resigns the Presidency of the Czechoslovak Republic, his country will lose his political services but the world will gain a history which he will be uniquely able to write.

"We have reached the top," Masaryk said repeatedly to the young man who would follow him as President when they were in Paris

together in that December of 1918, "but it is easier to reach the top than to stay there."

When Dr Beneš recorded those words in 1927 he did not know the deadly truth of them.

On December 14th President Masaryk left Paris to return to Prague by way of Italy. He arrived in Prague on December 21st, 1918, "almost by the same route as the one by which, four years earlier, on December 18th, 1914, he had left Prague on his adventurous "pilgrimage around the world."

The President took up his residence in the Castle at Prague a few weeks before his sixty-ninth birthday. It is fantastic that Beneš was able to accomplish what he did when he was so young and not less fantastic that Masaryk should have been drawing near to sixty-five when he set out upon that Odyssey.

The third member of the triumvirate, General Štefánik, was still in Siberia during those stirring times of victory. The Czechoslovak troops out there were impatient for Europe, and he was maintaining order. These troops had many months yet to remain far away from home. The Allies were using them out there for imaginary political advantages, and with the Peace negotiations in view, the Czechoslovak Government decided that they should sacrifice their own desires to the good of their country. Masaryk had always known that an army was vital to the success of his dream, but even his clairvoyance never envisaged that such an army would be contributed in Siberia to their country's triumph at the Peace Conference of Versailles. Štefánik himself came back in February 1919 to Paris when the Conference was sitting. Here is a vivid picture of him from Harold Nicolson's diary (March 20th):¹

"Meet Stefanik at luncheon. The young Czech Commander-in-Chief and Minister of War—slim, anæmic, nervous, energetic, powerful: a yellow face with a granulated nose: eyes wide, staring—Bright's disease or heart: or perhaps a little mad. Yes, his eyes goggle, it may be lunacy or great intelligence. Speaks bad French very quickly. Bored by Conference. He thinks only of the Siberian position, of his army there, of the hopeless way in which the Council of Ten only finger the Russian nettle. He was one of the first to reach Ekaterinburg after the Tsar's murder."

In Paris Štefánik secured the support of Marshal Foch for the transport of the Czechoslovak troops in Siberia from Vladivostok to Europe, and he was able to convince many people that an offensive

¹ *Peacemaking*, 1919, p. 286.

against the Bolsheviks was not such a simple matter as was believed. From Paris he went on to Italy, where he was *persona grata*. During his exploits in the air he had flown over the Austrian front and discovered some Austrian Divisions unknown to General Cadorna. His information enabled the Italian Commander-in-Chief to check the Austrian offensive. His political views were more conservative than Masaryk's, and somewhat extravagantly he had advocated a monarch for Czechoslovakia from the House of Savoy. When Masaryk published his Declaration of Independence at Washington in October 1918 Štefánik had dissented from the programme drawn up. He did not believe in the possibility of building up a democratic Republic. After a time he recognized that Masaryk was right and withdrew his protest.

He went on from Paris to Italy in the spring of 1919, and on May 4th he left Udine in a plane to fly back to Slovakia, a plan he had long cherished. That same day he crashed to death upon his native soil near Bratislava.

The members of the Government summoned Dr Beneš to Prague after Masaryk left; but he had too much work to do, and it was September 24th, 1919, before he returned home, like Masaryk after four years away from his country—"four years of toil and struggle abroad, during which there had been no respite and no moments without anxiety."

CHAPTER XII

ON January 16th, 1919, Mr Harold Nicolson records in his diary¹ that Benes, the Czech Foreign Minister and Delegate, lunched with him and notes that "his points are: (1) Bohemia wants to reconstruct Mittel Europa on a new basis which is neither German nor Russian. She therefore bases her claims 'not so much on national as on international justifications.' For her, although national unity comes first, and national prosperity second, the ultimate aim is the stability of Central Europe. For this she must have a territorial connexion both with Jugo-Slavia and Rumania. The latter connexion to be established in Ruthenia: the Galician Ruthenes being mostly Jews do not want to go to Russia, still less to Rumania. (2) Friendly relations with Hungary will eventually impose themselves by economic necessity. Hungary has always been pro-German even if anti-Austrian. We Westerners have been misled by assuming that her anti-Vienna policy implied an anti-Berlin policy also. (3) He found a great gulf between himself and those of his colleagues, such as Kramarsh, who had remained in Prague during the whole war. They thought only in terms of extreme Czech nationalism, and thus rendered his own position difficult. His aim was to maintain in Paris the moral prestige which the Czechs had won during the war, I say 'Parfaitement, Excellence.'

"Altogether an intelligent, young, plausible, little man with broad views."

On January 29th, Mr Nicolson notes:

"To the Quai d'Orsay in the morning. . . . In the anteroom are Kramarsh and Benes sitting on gilt chairs as if awaiting the dentist. Kramarsh large, bluff, hair *en brosse*, exuberant, has a nice German smell. Benes small, yellow, silly little imperial, intelligent eyes rather like Keynes's, fine forehead. . . . Pichon emerges from his room like a fussy owl. Says we needn't stay. Off we go."

On February 5th, Mr Nicolson notes:

"To the Council of Ten to hear the Czechs state their case. Benes does the talking and Kramarsh sits sturdily behind. The latter shares Bratianu's indignation at being treated as of no importance. I must say that Clemenceau is extremely rude to the Small Powers: but then he is extremely rude to the Big Powers also.

¹ *Peacemaking*, 1919, pp. 239-240.

"Benes begins his case at 3.0 and finishes at 6.30. A lengthy and exacting performance. He dwelt too long on minor points. . . . Clemenceau, when it was over, approached Kramarsh 'Mais il a été d'une longueur, votre Benes!'"

On March 4th, Mr Nicolson notes:

"Czech sub-committee. We summon Benes and ask him endless questions: never have I known so voluble a man."

On May 3rd, Mr Nicolson notes:

"In afternoon go to the 'Conseil des Cinq'—*i.e.*, the subsidiary Supreme Council—of the Foreign Ministers . . . the only people there are Lansing, Pichon, Hardinge, and the Japanese. . . . They then pass to the Grosse Schütt. When in Prague I had begged Smuts to urge on Masaryk not to claim that wretched Danubian Island. He had done so. Masaryk had agreed that if they could obtain a bridgehead across the river at Pressburg [Bratislava] they would abandon the Grosse Schütt. . . . To my dismay, however, Pichon put up Laroche to say that he had heard from Benes that Smuts had 'completely misunderstood' old Masaryk. All the latter had said was 'that *some* people in Czechoslovakia thought this would be a good arrangement, but that the Czech Government thought it would be a very bad arrangement. . . .'"

"This, I fear, is untrue. It increases my dislike of Kramarsh, who is behind everything nasty that Beneš does. They are in the pockets of the French."

On May 5th, Mr Nicolson notes:

"Czech Committee in morning. We discuss Smuts's conversation with Masaryk and the Grosse Schütt. I have to admit that I was only in the adjoining room. Laroche backs up his argument by producing a written note from Benes. We are forced to give way. The Czechs will have their Magyars and their Island. . . . Evidently Masaryk committed a gaffe and has been forced to deny it by his Government."

On May 15th, Mr Nicolson notes:

"A Czech Committee in morning to hear Benes upon Ruthenian autonomy. Not very helpful."

On May 17th, Mr Nicolson notes:

"Czech Committee in morning to discuss Benes's scheme for the autonomy of the Ruthenes. We accept it."

Many pages might be written about Dr Beneš's presentation of the Czechoslovak case during those first six months of 1919, and at the end of them a confused reader would be left with a much less lifelike portrait of Beneš himself and a much less adequate picture of his methods than those snapshots taken by that privileged, experienced, and

sensitive observer of the daily scene at the Peace Conference. When on January 15th Mr Nicolson notes as the first point made by Dr Beneš that Bohemia's ultimate aim is the achievement of Central European stability he has noted the cornerstone of Dr Beneš's policy for twenty years to come. When on May 3rd he suspects that Dr Kramář is behind everything nasty that Beneš does he is suspecting Dr Beneš of sacrificing the achievement of Central European stability to the demands of an exigent nationalism. And although he adds, in the irritation of the moment, that the two Czechoslovak delegates are in the pockets of the French, when he looks back at the lessons he gained at the Peace Conference Mr Nicolson puts Dr Beneš with Mr Balfour, Mr Lloyd George, Lord Robert Cecil, General Smuts, Venizelos, and Eyre Crowe as one of his teachers. "Beneš taught me that the Balance of Power was not necessarily a shameful, but possibly a scientific thing. He showed me that only upon the firm basis of such a balance could the fluids of European amity pass and repass without interruption."

Clearly Dr Beneš's international justification for the Succession State of Czechoslovakia established itself in the mind of a wise contemporary observer as more representative of his true aims than mere national assertiveness. He was fully aware of the necessity for national unity and national prosperity, but the object beyond either of these was international stability. Lloyd George seemed to discover twenty years later that he had been tricked by Dr Beneš's "professions of sympathy for the exalted ideals proclaimed by the Allies and America in their crusade for international right." For Lloyd George to maintain that he and Clemenceau and Wilson were misled by the young Foreign Minister of a Succession State in the mixing of the materials from which that State was compounded argues an ignorance, a laziness, and a credulity which really cannot be imputed to what once upon a time was called the Big Three. The alternative is to accuse the Big Three of not believing in their own exalted ideals and accepting Dr Beneš's profession of them as a piece of opportunism which they found convenient at the time. On the whole, we shall probably be wise to accept *The Truth about the Peace Treaties* as an expression of the same mood in Lloyd George that inspired Neville Chamberlain to send Lord Runciman to Prague in July 1938—that mood which supposed that by surrendering to German discontent over a German minority the immense discontent of the German majority could be assuaged, and European peace assured. Lloyd George need not have worried about his own faults of omission or commission so far as Czechoslovakia

is concerned. If every German in Bohemia had been saved for the Weimar Republic by Lloyd George's personal intervention against the rapacity of Dr Beneš the world would still have been faced sooner or later by the problem of how to accommodate itself to the avid egomania of the German nation.

If we condemn Czechoslovakia as an imperfect amalgam we must condemn first of all Austria-Hungary and then Poland, Yugoslavia, and Rumania as equally imperfect amalgams. That Dr Beneš did his utmost to secure for Czechoslovakia frontiers which would give the new State a prospect of economic strength cannot be held against him. He would have been a great deal more short-sighted than Lloyd George considered him if he had done otherwise. Without economic security he could not have hoped to set an example of good democratic government. If the inclusion of a certain number of Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenians, and unwilling Slovaks was a violation of the principles for which the Allies proclaimed they had been fighting the war, then those principles were violated extensively by the Allies in whatever direction on the map of the world one looks. No doubt the ideal procedure would have been to hold plebiscites everywhere in Central Europe before the Peace Conference met; but ideal procedure was ruled out by the immediate practical need of the moment, which was to save a tottering edifice from complete collapse. It may be regrettable that Dr Beneš and Count Karolyi did not establish between them a federation of old Austria-Hungary as a liberal democracy, but unfortunately since 1867 the Magyars had become a byword for all that was least liberal and democratic. Nobody in Central Europe believed that more than an insignificant minority of them was capable even of tolerating other races, let alone of co-operating with them. It may be regrettable that Dr Beneš should have seemed so much more obsessed by the need to destroy Austria-Hungary than Germany as a threat to European peace and prosperity, and that this obsession should have run counter to the prejudices of Mr Lloyd George and President Wilson; but the Emperor Charles was a threat to the present, and Hitler was not yet a threat to the future. The British and Americans never faced the fact that the object of the Allies in breaking up the Habsburg Empire was the imperative necessity of presenting a stronger barrier to German expansionism eastward. Therefore, almost from the moment that Germany cracked they began to perceive in the French anxiety to paralyse their beaten foe an ungenerous revengefulness. This notion was reflected at the time by Mr Nicolson's entry in his diary that Kramář and Beneš were in the pockets of the French.

It is an English characteristic to forget the past and ignore the future: no nation lives more completely in the present, and its conservatism, unlike that of the Scots or Irish, is not of the past, but of the present. It is fair to say that by the time the Peace Conference began the mood of England was already an inclination to overlook what the Germans had done and pay more heed to what the Bolsheviks were doing. The cry of "Hang the Kaiser" was typical of the profound ignorance in Britain of the cause of the war. We shall run the same risk if we fail to realize that Nazism was the effect, not the cause, of Germanic madness. The obliteration of Hitler and all his accomplices will have no curative value unless the German people can afterwards acquire a liberal objectivity of attitude; and that will not be acquired except over a long period of psychiatry. A prognosis of the course of the mental disease with which the German nation is afflicted offers small hope of a cure by the methods of Western medicine. Will the East provide the necessary physicians?

It will be remembered that Hitler railed at Beneš because he was supposed to have promised at the Peace Conference to make Czechoslovakia a second Switzerland and had broken his word. This accusation was continuously ground out by the propaganda machine of Goebbels during the months which preceded the deliberately engineered Sudeten 'crisis.' It is based on an alleged Note put forward by Dr Beneš on May 20th, 1919, about the future of Czechoslovakia and made to appear in the light of a formal and solemn undertaking. It was a private and personal Note for which M. Berthelot had asked for his own guidance in discussing minority problems at the Peace Conference.

This 'Note' was nothing more solemn than a summary by Dr Beneš of discussions he had had with members of the Commission engaged on drafting the Treaty to safeguard the rights of the minorities in the various Succession States. It was a statement of his own ideas about the treatment of the minorities which Czechoslovakia would inherit, and his optimism led him to attribute those ideas of his to the future Czechoslovak Government.

Here are the nine points in the 'Note':

- I. The Czechoslovak Government intends to organize its State by taking as the bases of the rights of the nationalities the principles applied in the constitution of the Swiss Republic, that is to say, the Government designs to make of the Czechoslovak Republic a sort of Switzerland, while paying regard of course to the special conditions of Bohemia.

2. Universal franchise coupled with the system of proportional representation will be introduced—which will ensure to the various nationalities in the Republic a proportional representation in all elected organs [institutions].
3. The schools throughout the whole territory of the State will in general be maintained out of public funds, and they will be established for the individual nationalities in the parishes as soon as the necessity arises, on the basis of the number of children in the parish as fixed by law, to inaugurate a school.
4. All public professions [functions] will be accessible to the individual nationalities living in the Republic.
5. The courts of justice will be mixed courts in respect of the language employed, and the Germans will be able to bring their causes before the highest courts in their own language.
6. The local administration (local affairs of the parishes and districts) will be carried on in the language of the majority of the population.
7. The question of a person's religion will not be posed in the Czechoslovak Republic—there will be no difficulties in this connexion.
8. The official language will be the Czech language, and the State for external purposes will be a Czechoslovak State. In practice, however, the German language will be the second language of the country, and will be employed on a basis of equality in the current administration, before the courts, and in the central parliament. It is the intention of the Czechoslovak Government in practice and daily usage to satisfy the population in this connexion, but at the same time, of course, a special position will be reserved for the Czechoslovak language and the Czechoslovak element.
9. Expressed in another way we can say that the present position (the Germans had a huge preponderance) in its broad outline will remain unchanged; only the privileges which the Germans had previously enjoyed will be reduced to their due proportions (for example, the number of German schools will be reduced where these schools shall be found superfluous).

In general it will be a very liberal regime approaching considerably the Swiss regime. . . .

Let it be made absolutely clear that there was never any kind of negotiation about these nine points. The Allied statesmen never imposed upon Dr Beneš any conditions demanding the application or realiza-

tion of any of these nine points. On the contrary, a Minority Treaty was drawn up and concluded between Czechoslovakia and the Allies which asked for nothing contained in the nine points.

And yet those nine points were fulfilled more strictly than any other programme put forward for the future at the Peace Conference. When Dr Beneš offered the Swiss Republic as a prototype of the Czechoslovak Republic he had overlooked the geographical difficulties of his own country compared with Switzerland. The German, French, and Italian cantons are there clearly defined. There are no French towns surrounded by German villages and no German towns surrounded by French villages. The line of demarcation between Czech and German in Czechoslovakia was in parts where the Germans were scattered incapable of sharp definition. Yet why should a biographer be put to the fatigue of argument about this question? The First World War was not fought to secure a privileged position for the Germans of Bohemia and Moravia or for the Magyars of Slovakia.

Through the centuries Germans had infiltrated into Bohemia and Moravia as they have infiltrated into many other regions over Europe, but such an infiltration did not affect natural frontiers. Mountains sometimes play as important a part in self-determination as men. There were three reasonable courses open to the Germans of the Succession State. They could emigrate to Germany, they could emigrate to Austria, or they could remain as loyal citizens. Being Germans they chose a fourth and unreasonable course of remaining as disloyal citizens, although let it be added that nearly a million out of the three and a half millions of them did co-operate with the Czechoslovak Government.

If Mr Lloyd George, General Smuts, and President Wilson had insisted upon cracking the Bohemian basin to create an artificial frontier in the interest of the so-called Sudeten Germans Europe might have been spared Hitler's noisome ranting against Dr Beneš and the Poles might have been at once the subject and the object of it in the summer of 1938 instead of a year later. Lord Runciman might have spent a month mediating in Warsaw instead of in Prague. Neville Chamberlain might have flown to Berchtesgaden to hear Hitler's views on Danzig, and Mr Ashton-Gwatkin's bureaucratic gaucherie might have been displayed at the expense of Poles instead of Czechslovaks. It is all too easy to discover occasions for a future war in the Treaty of Versailles like the creation of a Polish corridor or the inclusion of two and half million disgruntled Germans in Czechoslovakia; but the sum total of such occasions do not provide the cause of the Second World War,

which was the apparently ineradicable obsession of the German people by the fantasy of that European *imperium* they believe themselves uniquely fitted to achieve.

What Dr Beneš's "plausibility" gained at Versailles was the most logically constructed Succession State of them all, and for nearly twenty years Czechoslovakia was saluted as a successful experiment, until the moral collapse of the British and French peoples under the imagination of impending war demanded an excuse for their cowardice and found it in Dr Beneš's "plausibility." In other words, the British and French Governments in 1938 translated into diplomatic language the ravings of Hitler at Nuremberg and Berlin which were quoted in the prologue to this book.

The methods that Dr Beneš used to secure provisional recognition of the Czechoslovak State and of the Czechoslovak Army while the war was being fought were the same methods as he used to secure permanent recognition at the Peace Conference. Briefly, they consisted of indefatigable industry in writing a memorandum or arguing a case verbally, of always expending infinite patience in winning the sympathy even of the least apparently important sub-committee man before he had to present his written memorandum or his verbal argument to the men at the very top, of losing no opportunity to make the headquarters of the Czechoslovak delegation a clearing-house for the mutual exchange of views by other delegates of the Succession States, and, perhaps most of all, of never lending himself to the intrigues inseparable from any agglomeration of nationalities whether in Paris at a Peace Conference or in Geneva at a meeting of the League of Nations.

Mr Nicolson's application of the adjective "plausible" to Dr Beneš and Mr Lloyd George's phrase about his being "full of professions of moderation, modesty and restraint" suggest insincerity. In point of fact, Dr Beneš has won his diplomatic victories by the disconcerting tactics of saying what he believes and believing what he says. He is certainly a persuasive pleader, but this is due to his control of facts and figures and his devotion to the theory he builds upon them. It is not at all due either to the distortion of his material in the interest of his argument or to any particular charm in the manner of its presentation. On one occasion in *My War Memoirs* he mentions that he exaggerated the figures of the Czechoslovak troops and explains the reason for making the mistake. This is typical of his frankness. The "longueur" of which Clemenceau complained and the "volubility" Mr Nicolson notes with an implied sigh of exhaustion were the result of an anxiety to let his case prove itself by his scrupulous accumulation of the minutiae of

evidence. He lacks all the graces of eloquence, and his anxiety to be accurate leads him into repetition. Certainly he is an opportunist, but only in the sense that the rapidity of his mind at once grasps the opportune moment, and often anticipates it. His attitude in the dispute with Poland over Teschen is an example of that. He is not an opportunist in the sense of sacrificing principle to expediency or truth to falsehood. He accepts the old Greek conception of Themis as binding upon politics, nor does he subscribe to the business-man's code of a dual morality. He is, indeed, an honest man, and since honest men are so very rarely clever and clever men so seldom honest, his undeniable cleverness is always acknowledged but his honesty is often suspected.

CHAPTER XIII

DR BENEŠ's work during the crowded years of the First World War has been recounted with some particularity. It would be impossible to present his subsequent career as a European statesman with comparable particularity unless readers were prepared to surrender to a detailed study of twenty years of European history, and such a study is far beyond the aim of this book. Nevertheless, the inevitable compression of twenty years will do Dr Beneš an injustice because his task as Foreign Minister of the Czechoslovak Republic was an arduous day-to-day labour which could not be conveyed except by the chronicle of it in detail. It is perhaps significant that Dr Beneš himself has not yet discussed or recorded his day-to-day labour during the Peace Conference. That is relegated to a single sentence when he writes:¹

"This period was no less exhausting and difficult than had been the war itself. . . . I did not return home until . . . September 24, 1919, after four years of toil and struggle abroad, during which there had been no respite and no moments without anxiety."

It would be easily comprehensible if the task of putting down on paper the tale of those months in Paris after the Armistice had dismayed even his powers of concentration and arrangement while he was still occupied with public affairs. An infinitesimally small proportion of the human race has known what really hard mental work means over a long period. Innumerable human beings perform the most exacting feats of physical endurance, and among them are a few individuals who have to perform at the same time feats of mental endurance. The result of the rarity of hard mental work is that the extraordinary capacity for it of Dr Beneš, who has been driving himself mentally at full speed for some forty years, cannot be generally appreciated. Moreover, the average man regards the mental agility of another as an advantage over himself and finds it difficult to believe that the possessor of it will not use that advantage in his own interest. If Dr Beneš were a writer or a composer his selfless devotion to his work might be recognized, but inasmuch as it is statesmanship to which such devotion is given he must incur the suspicion of personal ambition.

Yet Dr Beneš's approach to politics is curiously similar to an artist's approach to the object of his creative effort. He is animated by the

¹ *My War Memoirs*, p. 487.

same passion for truth as animates the genuine artist. The consciousness of having always aimed at the truth is what sustains him and always will sustain him. After the defeat of truth by the Munich surrender he recovered equanimity because he believed that truth must ultimately prevail. If ambition had been his master the shock of Munich must have induced despair.

It was unfortunate, though inevitable, that the First Delegate of Czechoslovakia at the Peace Conference was Dr Karel Kramář, because the two men looked at almost every problem for which they were called upon to find a solution from an opposite angle. Kramář was twenty-four years older than Beneš. He had been a long time in politics. He had been condemned to death during the war, which offset in his own opinion all the practical work his young colleague had done abroad and entitled him to believe in the superior worth of his experience. He was anti-Austrian, but he was also fundamentally anti-democratic. He had hoped and expected that the liberation of Bohemia would be effected by the victorious Russian armies of the Grand Duke Nicolas, and he regarded Bolshevism with abhorrence. When the question of the future of the Czechoslovak Legion in Siberia came up Kramář encouraged the British plan to use it in support of counter-revolutionary military activities. He would not accept Masaryk's belief in the ever-growing strength of the Bolsheviks as an insuperable obstacle to the success of any military adventures against them, and so he hampered his young colleague's efforts to reach an arrangement with the British authorities to transport the Legion from Vladivostok back to Europe. He always adopted an intransigent and excessively nationalist attitude throughout the territorial discussions at the Conference, and when he returned to Prague he was primarily responsible for the atmosphere of hostility by which Beneš soon found himself enveloped.

It may be remembered that, when Dr Beneš returned to Prague in 1908 from studies abroad undertaken with the object of fitting himself to enter politics in the year 1918, he rejected two offers from leaders of political parties to join them and that finally when he attached himself to Masaryk's Progressive Party it was in the unusual mood for a neophyte of moderate opposition. That unwillingness of his to give up to party what was meant for mankind endured.

The opportunity which war gave him and of which he made such full use speeded up his political career to an unexpected celerity. By the date he had planned to enter politics he was already Foreign Minister of a State whose independence and provisional frontiers had been formally recognized, thanks to him, before the Peace Conference

began. Perhaps the success of Dr Beneš in Paris would not have earned him so much jealousy if the President-Liberator had not made it clear before his chief lieutenant returned to Prague that he regarded him as his natural successor. Moreover, at that date Masaryk was close upon seventy and in expressing this opinion he was not thinking of some vague date in the future. In fact, when the Constitution of the new Republic was being discussed he opposed the suggested minimum age of forty-five for future Presidents and insisted upon thirty-five, expressly stating to the conference of fifty-year-old party leaders that he wanted to make legal provision for the election of Beneš to the Presidency.

Dr Kramář, the Prime Minister, made no secret of his resentment, nor was Dr Antonín Švehla, the leader of the Agrarian Party, pleased. He was Minister of the Interior in the first Government, an able man ten years younger than Kramář, who had been a farmer before he entered politics. He was a friend of Masaryk, who was able to counter some of his prejudice against Beneš, but even Masaryk could not reconcile Kramář to his Foreign Minister. The antagonism developed after Beneš's return home. Kramář went so far as to call Beneš too unscrupulous for politics and demand his abstention from State Affairs.

In September 1921 Dr Beneš became Prime Minister for a year, but he remained Foreign Minister and was too much preoccupied with a constructive foreign policy to devote the attention that home affairs demanded from the head of a Government. In the autumn of 1922 Dr Švehla formed a Cabinet in which Dr Beneš remained Foreign Minister. Governments came and Governments went. Dr Beneš remained Foreign Minister. He was accused of profiting by his knowledge of State secrets; but he remained Foreign Minister. He was accused of spending the money of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs upon himself; but he remained Foreign Minister. *Les absents ont toujours tort.* The man not there is always wrong. Dr Beneš, travelling all over Europe on his country's business, preferred to be wrong in Prague to being wrong in Paris or Bucharest or Belgrade,* in Geneva or Genoa or Locarno. He was a *commis voyageur* of treaties and agreements and ententes: as Foreign Minister he was his own salesman. A man of complete integrity with a passion for good workmanship finds it easy to despise slander: a man in search of truth cannot afford to waste his vitality in the pursuit and destruction of trivial lies, any more than a fisherman with a determined salmon at the end of his rod can afford to pay attention to midges. On one occasion Dr Beneš consented to attend a private Court of Honour at which his enemies failed ignobly to substantiate a single charge against him and had the mortification

of hearing it established that Dr Beneš had been one of the few—one of the very few—who had spent all his substance on the movement for the liberation of his country when that movement was a more than hazardous investment.

In 1923 Masaryk was persuaded by the leaders of the chief political parties that the Foreign Minister's refusal to attach himself to any political party was an ill-advised emphasis upon independence. The President had been approached by a delegation of party chiefs demanding a label for Dr Beneš, and it was now up to Dr Beneš to choose his label. The Foreign Minister's zest for accommodation was roused. He was willing to join a political party. The only stipulation he made was that it could not be one of the parties of the Right. After Mussolini's October revolution Dr Kramář's party had shown a tendency to move in the direction of Fascism, and the virus was capable of spreading even in democratic Czechoslovakia.

Masaryk thought it would be a good idea if Beneš joined the Agrarian Party, which stood more or less in the Centre; but Švehla vetoed this. Švehla did not want the ricks of the Agrarian Party fired by Beneš and Beneš himself had no desire to fire them. In the end the four chiefs of the largest political parties met solemnly to decide which party Beneš ought to join. It sounds like the Caucus race in *Alice in Wonderland*. After a grave discussion of Beneš's political affinities the Big Four of Czechoslovak politics ruled that this piece of debatable territory should be awarded to the National Socialist Party, a workers' party opposed to Marxism but definitely well on the Left. This decision was ceremoniously communicated to the President in writing. The National Socialist Party was so called to distinguish it from international Marxian Socialism.

Dr Beneš duly became a National Socialist, and his entry into the party was like putting a catfish into a tank of flat-fish or a cuckoo's egg into a hedge-sparrow's nest. At any rate, within a short while, various members of the Party to whom he objected were pushed out of the Party and proceeded to form another party whose policy was purely destructive, the object to be destroyed being Beneš himself. Later on this party became the noisy but ineffective Czechoslovak Fascist Party.

Les absents ont toujours tort. During those years when he was Foreign Minister he was more often away from Prague than there. His duties at Geneva, where he was six times Chairman of the Council of the League and finally President of the Assembly, kept him abroad many months. There were the various European conferences—the Disarmament Conference alone lasted seven months—and there were the con-

sultations with other Foreign Ministers. It was galling for Hitler that this man of so many political pilgrimages declined every invitation to visit him.

At last, in 1927, Dr Beneš took a holiday. He and Mme Beneš went to stay on Port Cros, one of the small islands off Marseilles, and as it was understood that the Foreign Minister required a rest of some months it was felt that during such an absence he could be represented as more wrong than ever. The attacks on him in the Czechoslovak Press were intensified, and newspapers in Czechoslovakia are thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. At one time his opponents had tried to make his name taboo in the Press on the ground that he had planned to subsidize it in the interest of his own career; but that had been a fiasco, because Beneš enjoyed the freedom of the Press all over the Continent of Europe. No doubt the completeness with which Beneš had identified himself with the ideals of Masaryk made it impossible to destroy him without simultaneously dealing a mortal wound to the President-Liberator, and that the Czechoslovak politicians shrank from doing. No doubt, too, many of the attacks on Beneš were made with the feeling that he possessed some of the insensitiveness of the machine. There was an inhuman quality in his efficiency, in his continuously rational approach to every problem, in his gluttony for work, and in his cocksureness, as it seemed to more uncertain minds. His reiterated tributes to democracy, his eternal preaching of the democratic creed, his demolatry it might indeed be called, all marked him down as a suitable victim for democracy. Gratitude is as rare a virtue in peoples as in princes, but the last thing Dr Beneš would have demanded or expected from either was gratitude. He had discarded romantic self-indulgence; he had freed himself from sentimental illusions. He had challenged democracy, and therefore he asked from it no thanks, nor even mercy if democracy should reject him as no longer serviceable. His joy was in his craft, and the accomplishment of a task its own reward. He could afford to be cynical about the parts, so ardent was his faith in the whole.

So when he was forced to cut short his holiday before it was nearly as long as he had planned in order to come back to Prague and rebut a charge of corruption over the agrarian reforms one may surmise that the pleasure of exposing the incompetent inventors of such tales was as good a tonic as the breezes of the azure coast.

And in the end the attacks upon him by politicians who were still the prey of the provincial pettiness that always affects the political life of a subordinate nation defeated their own object. An egalitarian State demands common sense from its democracy if it is to survive. The

Czechs have acquired that common sense, which is less noticeable in the Slovaks and the Poles, and that fundamental Czech common sense was compelled to recognize that a man like Dr Beneš could not have survived so much criticism and denigration if he really deserved it. Egalitarians with common sense like the Czechs are aware that nothing fosters jealousy so well as equality of opportunity; and when jealousy is the handle the most sedulously ground blade of criticism slips out of it harmlessly. Common sense asserted itself. When Masaryk retired from the Presidency at the age of eighty-five there was nobody in Czechoslovakia whom the people would have welcomed as a successor except Dr Beneš.

Nevertheless, the fact remained that owing to the constitution Dr Beneš had to be elected President not by a popular vote but by the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. Beneš himself refused to accept nomination unless the election was to be unanimous, and efforts were made by the aged President-Liberator to achieve such unanimity by the coalition of all Government parties. To this end he deferred his resignation for several months, but finally, on December 14th, 1935, he declared himself unable to perform the duties of his office any longer and four days later the election was held by a joint sitting of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies in the Castle of Prague. Dr Němec, a University professor, was put forward as an opponent and received 24 votes out of 440. Dr Beneš received 340 votes and thus became President of the Czechoslovak Republic for seven years. Seventy-eight blank papers were handed in, representing presumably the German vote and that of the insignificant if noisy minority of Czechoslovak Fascists.

On September 14th, 1937, the President-Liberator died in his eighty-seventh year. Some extracts from the funeral oration of Dr Beneš on September 21st will illustrate what Masaryk was and the ideals he bequeathed to his successor.

"Eighty-seven years of a completely full life, more than sixty of which he devoted to a struggle for the comprehension of man; reflected how to master the metaphysical problem of life and the world, how to interpret all the questions of spiritual, intellectual, political and social life; for more than fifty years sought how to triumph over and lead the State, how to attain practical knowledge of self, of nation, of State, of Europe, of all other nations and their problems; and at the same time he daily entered upon grave political struggles in concrete questions and undertook all the detailed work of political practice, first within his own nation, afterwards in the old Empire, in the European

crisis and the Great War, and then founded and consolidated the State, and all the time steadily prepared for us who are left behind a legacy, and paths along which it now falls to us to carry Masaryk's torch, the torch which so splendidly shone forth into the world! . . .

"He completed the ideological, intellectual, and cultural re-birth of our nation. Masaryk was our last national, spiritual and moral pioneer and 'awakener'. He was the last and greatest in that he crowned the intellectual awakening by political and constitutional re-birth—and—as a Moravian Slovak—by Czechoslovak unity. . . .

"Thus Masaryk . . . became in his own person an incorporation and concentration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with their grievances, with their problems and with their development. . . .

"He came to the conclusion that . . . a Fourth Estate would in every State and nation come forward to claim a share in the power and new and better conditions of existence—the estate of the worker, the farmer, the small and the middle-class manual and mental worker . . . that the question was posed in all its integral character in the Great War of 1914, and that in this sense European post-war society is still engaged in its new and gigantic struggle for existence and for its fate to this very day. It is a transition of middle-class democracy from old to new forms and stages of a higher and at the same time more profound humanitarian democracy in which all the classes and all the citizens are to receive their due place in the new harmonious entity of State and nation. . . .

"What Europe is passing through to-day—this medley of dissensions, fights, revolutions and spiritual upheavals, this diversity of political and social regimes, of national and international movements, of moral and philosophical conflicts—all this constitutes the problem with which Masaryk occupied himself. . . .

"Masaryk saw in the individual, in man, a manifestation of the absolute and the most beautiful creation of Providence—something thus inviolate in his substance, in his spirituality, and in metaphysical and ethical equality with the rest of mankind. This thought cannot be dissociated from the religious element. Man can therefore be only the object of thought, the object of political and social activity, never an instrument or means. Nor can the nation, nor may the nation, composed of individuals thus respected, be an instrument or means, neither can it nor may it be something above the individual, something to which the individual is sacrificed, something which as a collectivity is deified. . . .

"He turned to the fountain of his unique life-experience and expressed quietly, firmly, Platonically, and in a Christian spirit, his

answer to all these questions of the disturbed Europe of to-day in a formula which was simultaneously his philosophy and life's practice and which . . . contrasted in all their historic greatness two great moral worlds that oppose one another: Jesus—not Caesar. . . .

"To be a democrat meant for Masaryk to create a logically balanced synthesis of all man's spiritual powers, a balance and inner discipline of soul, an equilibrium of intellect and feeling, the heroic conscious strength of the human self, and at the same time pious humility in the face of the world and its metaphysical problem, before man in his millions of masks and before the right of every one of mankind to happiness and a genuinely human, free existence. . . .

"He will be the symbol of our evolutionary harmony of class and social elements, the symbol of ever renewing harmony of persons and parties, the symbol of harmony among the nationalities in our State. . . .

"I call upon you all without exception, from Left to Right, from the remotest hamlet to this our metropolis, from Aš to Jasina—I call upon you all who ponder most upon the social problems of this State and upon you who devote your attention most to nationality problems—I call upon you all without distinction, in the spirit and in the remembrance of our First President, to take up your heritage from him and complete his work, the perfecting of our just, firm, indomitable, evolutionary, humanitarian democracy.

"Though he passes Masaryk is still among us, he is the model and the call for each one of us. He is the model of great faith in man, of which there is to-day much need in Europe and throughout the world: the call for us to be harmonious among ourselves, in good will and in friendship with our neighbours and the other countries of Europe and of the world to build up our State organization and our political, social and nationality collaboration in such manner that we may make of this our place in Europe a perfect and harmonious State, just in its social, national and political system, a State that shall be worthy of him who has left us, a State that shall be among the States what Masaryk was amongst us, and what Masaryk was to the rest of the world."

That oration was not the rhetoric of elegiac convention: in that tribute to the Great Dead, the pupil, the collaborator, the successor, and the friend affirmed his own creed. At the date when those words were spoken the skies were already darkening over Europe. One year hence, on the anniversary of Masaryk's funeral, President Beneš and the Government of the Czechoslovak Republic would capitulate to the ultimatum presented by the British and French Ministers at two o'clock

in the morning. The man who had affirmed his faith in democracy on September 21st, 1937, would find himself on September 21st, 1938, abandoned by the two great democracies of Western Europe. And yet then even as in a broken voice hardly audible he said to his friends "we have been disgracefully betrayed" he was able almost immediately to exhort them not to lose their faith in democracy.

CHAPTER XIV

THE larger objective of that humanitarian democracy towards the evolution of which Masaryk dedicated the State that he with the help of Beneš had called into being was dependent for its ultimate achievement on national unity in diversity, on national prosperity through a well-planned economy, and on that national security without which all other objectives, large or small, would dissolve like dreams. National security was the prime task of Dr Beneš as Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia from October 1918 until he was elected President in December 1935.

The most urgent question for the new Republic was to protect itself against Hungarian irredentism; and the welding of what became known as the Little Entente between Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Rumania, the beneficiaries of the Treaty of Trianon, was the first diplomatic effort to which Dr Beneš devoted himself. As far back as 1917-18, while he was still in Paris, that mixture of foresight and optimism had led him to prepare the way in conversations with the Serbian Minister in Paris and the statesmanlike Take Jonescu, of Rumania. The Archduke Joseph's attempt to found a Habsburg kingdom in August 1919, after the White Terror had made the previous Red Terror of Bela Kun look like nothing, had indicated the direction from which danger might be expected, and almost immediately after his return to Prague in September 1919 Dr Beneš was pressing upon the Yugoslav Government the necessity to get the common interest of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia embodied in a formal defensive alliance between the two countries. This was accomplished on August 14th, 1920, when Beneš and Ninčić signed a treaty providing for common political and military action in the event of an unprovoked attack by Hungary on either of their two States. Three days later Dr Beneš went to Bucharest, and on August 19th Rumania agreed to give "reciprocal military assistance." by the three countries, after the first unsuccessful attempt by the ex-Emperor Charles to recover the Iron Crown of St Stephen.

This tripartite agreement was forged by Dr Beneš. He had declared in January 1920 that any attempt to restore the ex-Emperor as King of Hungary, he never having renounced former Austro-Hungarian territories, would constitute for some of Hungary's neighbours a *casus belli*. When Charles tried the effect of entering Hungary on March 27th of that year Dr Beneš, after securing the consent of Yugoslavia and

Rumania, presented an ultimatum through the Czechoslovak Minister in Budapest three days later to the effect that unless the ex-Emperor quitted Hungarian soil at once Czechoslovakia would break off diplomatic relations, institute a blockade, and if necessary make a display of military force. The Hungarian Government replied that the ex-Emperor's presence in Hungary was a domestic problem. Dr Beneš wasted no time in arguing this question, and when the ex-Emperor dallied he notified Budapest on April 3rd that if he had not left Hungary by 6 P.M. on April 7th the measures indicated by the previous ultimatum would immediately be carried out. The Conference of Ambassadors in Paris sent an *aide-mémoire* referring to their decision on February 4th, 1921, that a Habsburg restoration could not be regarded as a domestic affair of the Hungarian State, and the ex-Emperor retired to Switzerland.

Dr Beneš had invited only the passive agreement, not the active support, of Yugoslavia and Rumania in his ultimatum, and in the conviction that fresh attempts would be made on the same lines he pressed upon the other two States the need for a more explicit arrangement. The Tripartite Pact followed the lines of the previous pact with Yugoslavia, but a clause was added to provide for a concerted policy in regard to Hungary. Dr Beneš was not satisfied with waiting for an attack before action was taken. Moreover, he realized that such a concert might be upset by differences between Yugoslavia and Rumania over some territory in the Banát that was in dispute, and he was not content until he had promoted a treaty between the two of them in which this question was settled.

The next trouble was a dispute between Hungary and Austria over the Burgenland, which the Treaty of Versailles had awarded to Austria, and this dispute Dr Beneš now set to work to adjust without pushing himself too much into the foreground. He discussed matters with Count Bánffy, the Hungarian Foreign Minister, at Marienbad, in June 1921 and arranged a meeting between the Austrian President Hainisch and Masaryk at Hallstatt. Meanwhile it had been decided by the Conference of Ambassadors in Paris to send an Allied Military Commission to superintend the transference of the Burgenland to Austria on August 29th. The Austrian gendarmerie marched in, only to be at once attacked by Hungarian irregular troops and thrown out again. An impasse was reached, made ridiculous by a protocol issued by the Allied Commission to certify that the Burgenland had been transferred to Austria in an orderly manner. Dr Beneš tried to persuade the Italian Government to offer mediation in conjunction with his own, the way for which had

been prepared by his diplomacy; but as soon as Italy interested herself in the affair Dr Beneš, sensible of Italian jealousy over Danubian affairs, tactfully withdrew when a meeting between the Austrian and Hungarian Foreign Ministers and Della Torretta, the Italian Foreign Minister, was arranged at Venice on October 13th. It was then decided to settle the future of Odenburg or Šopron by a plebiscite and allow Austria to take over the rest of the Burgenland, which was almost entirely populated by her own nationals.

A week after the meeting at Venice the ex-Emperor arrived back in Hungary, this time in an aeroplane, and put himself at the head of some of the irregular troops who had been fighting with the Austrians. On October 22nd Dr Beneš announced that the ex-Emperor's presence in Hungary was a *casus belli* and that Czechoslovakia would mobilize. Yugoslavia also ordered a partial mobilization. On the following day the ex-Emperor's supporters came into collision with the Government troops; on the day after Charles and the ex-Empress Zita with their chief supporter Count Andrássy were taken prisoner and detained in a monastery. The resolute attitude adopted by Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia compelled the Conference of Ambassadors to decide upon their attitude with more promptness than usual, and finally Great Britain accepted the responsibility of guaranteeing Hungary against any more attempts at a Habsburg restoration by internment of the ex-Emperor and ex-Empress on the island of Madeira. The unfortunate pair left Hungary on board the *Glowworm*, one of the British gunboats of the Danube Flotilla.

There were many people who thought at the time and who still think that Beneš made a mistake in pressing so vigorously for the exclusion of the whole Habsburg dynasty from eligibility for the Iron Crown. In view of later developments in Germany it is difficult to believe that a Habsburg on the throne of Hungary would have been a prophylactic against Hitler, and at the time Masaryk and Beneš (we must remember that Masaryk was as rigidly anti-Habsburg as Beneš) saw in a Habsburg restoration an encouragement not merely to Hungarian irredentism but also to Austrian legitimism. A Habsburg in Budapest with an eye on Vienna would have been a perpetual threat to the democratic State they had created to replace the Dual Monarchy and serve as a core for a Danubian Federation in the years to come. A Habsburg restoration has found its advocates during the present war, particularly in the State Department at Washington, a paradoxical shrine for the divine right of kings; but, indeed, throughout the war Washington has seemed bent on depriving Oxford of its prerogative to support lost causes and

impossible loyalties. Masaryk and Beneš could hardly be expected to succumb to the romantic appeal of a legitimist cause. To them the Habsburgs represented all that they had been fighting against since 1914, and beyond that all that the Czech nation had been fighting against for three hundred years. There was no doubt an almost personal animus in their attitude towards the House of Habsburg, but it was that animus which inspired Dr Beneš to act with such relentlessness in his handling of the critical situation brought about by the attempted *coup d'état*. He felt so strongly about the Habsburgs that for once he was incapable of compromise. He really made up the minds of the Conference of Ambassadors for them, and by his obvious determination to appeal to arms if necessary he forced them to give what must surely be one of the most rapid decisions in history extracted from a colloquy of diplomats.

Beneš's opposition to any restoration of the Habsburgs was not softened by time. On March 21st, 1934, when the question of the Anschluss was revived by the accession to power of Hitler, he delivered a speech to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czechoslovak Parliament in the course of which he said:

"It is not sentimental reasons of feelings of hatred to or aversion from this Dynasty which dictates this standpoint on the part of the three States of the Little Entente. It is our conviction that a return of the Habsburgs to Central Europe signifies a permanent, never-ceasing struggle for the heritage of the former Habsburg Empire. . . . The Habsburgs in Central Europe means that there will never be peace or quiet. That is the final word of the Little Entente countries."

What the verbal pomposity of the Germans calls the "Leader Principle" which infected Europe with that monstrous regiment of dictators has led many people to question whether man is politically developed enough to do without kingship. The mood of the English nation after its detestable experience of Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate was discernible in the Europe of two and a half centuries later. Dr Beneš could not have afforded to tolerate a restoration in Hungary. To set upon the throne of a country which believed that it had been deprived of its territorial rights a monarch who believed that he had been deprived of his territorial rights could only mean a certainty of trouble sooner or later. The Czechoslovak experiment had been made. There was every reason to suppose that if the new democratic amalgam extracted from the larger amalgam of the Habsburg Empire were given time to settle down it would be a successful experiment. To Masaryk and Beneš the Habsburg dynasty appeared a catalytic substance

incapable of change itself but disastrously able to change other bodies. Even the Poles, always suspicious of Czechoslovak policy and romantically inclined to regard themselves and the Magyars as the nucleus of an aristocratic Central Europe, agreed to associate themselves with the Little Entente in excluding the Habsburgs, and on November 9th, 1921, a treaty of friendship was signed between the four countries which gave promise of wide economic development.

The chief obstacle to good relations between Czechoslovakia and Poland had been the dispute over a part of Silesia which had begun as early as 1918. It had been reasonably settled by Dr Beneš and Premier Grabski at the Spa Conference in July 1920, when both of them accepted the arbitration of the Paris Conference of Ambassadors, which by a unanimous decision allotted the industrial part of the territory with the coalfields in the south to Czechoslovakia and the territorially much larger agricultural half with the town of Teschen to Poland. At the time the Poles were involved in their struggle with the Bolsheviks, and they felt that an unfair advantage had been taken of their position. On the other hand, Czechoslovak public opinion thought that Dr Beneš had surrendered far too much to Poland: indeed, his 'weakness' over Teschen was one of the high cards his enemies always played against him.

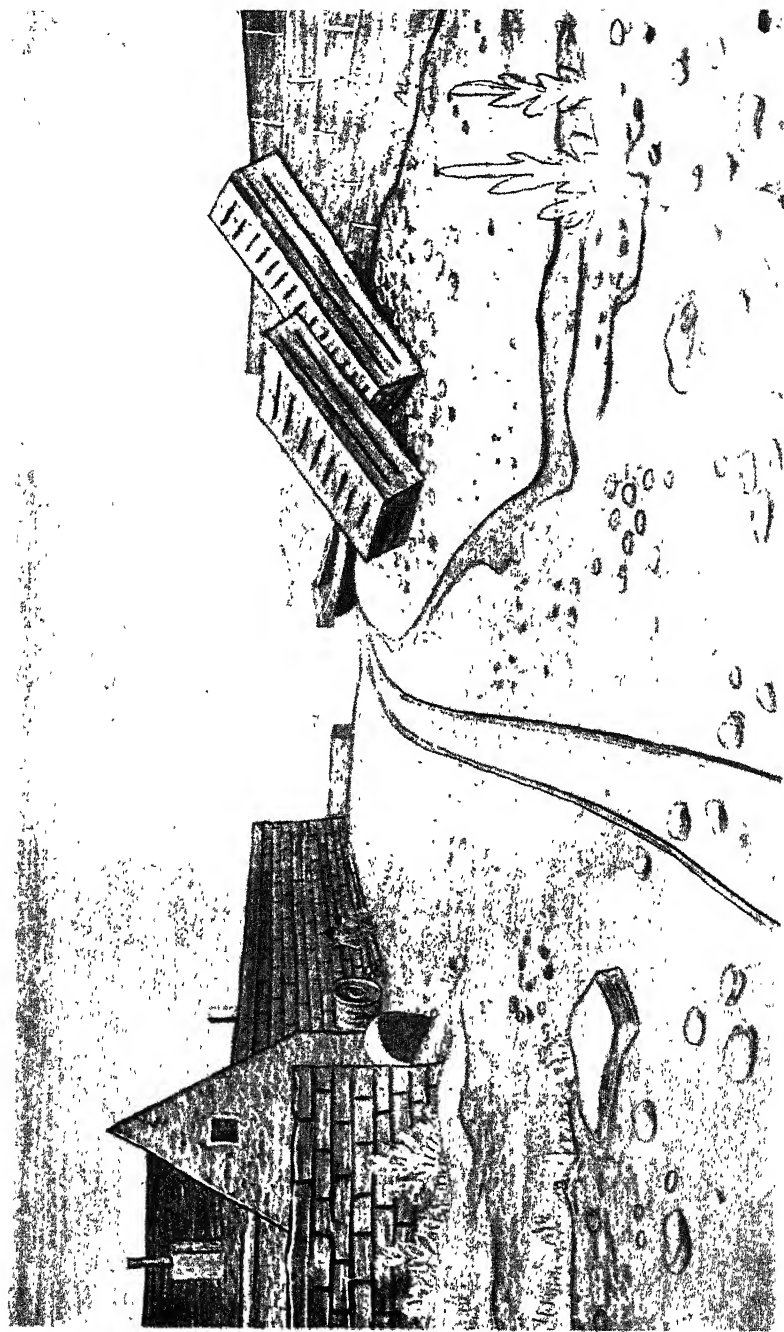
By the end of 1921 it did begin to look as if Poland with a democratic majority would bring herself into really intimate collaboration with the parvenu States of the Little Entente, and Beneš, who was already determined to get Russia into the concert of Europe, was intensely anxious to prepare the way by establishing a complete understanding with Poland. His view was that Russia was bound to enter more and more actively into European affairs and that Czechoslovakia and Poland should be prepared for this event by displaying a common policy of goodwill beforehand. The consistency of Dr Beneš's attitude towards Russia from the time he opposed the British plan to use the Czech Legion in Siberia for the support of futile counter-revolutionary activity is to be noted.

The World Economic Conference at Genoa, which began in mid-April 1922, was the only tangible result of the Conference at Cannes between Great Britain, France, and Belgium. It was at Cannes that the photograph was published showing Mr Lloyd George giving M. Briand a lesson in golf, which was the last straw that broke the back of the French Premier's popularity. The resentment over this absurd incident was a reflection of the nervous anxiety of French public opinion about the refusal first of the Americans and then of the British to guarantee France against German aggression in the future.



VASE WITH FLOWERS

Oil painting by Václav Špála (1885–1946).



FISHING HARBOUR IN BRITTANY

Tempera by Jan Zrzavý (b. 1890).

Briand, after holding office for a year, was succeeded by Poincaré, who was hostile to conferences and preferred the old methods of diplomacy. It has not yet been related that Beneš had a decisive influence in the disagreement between Poincaré and Lloyd George. He persuaded Poincaré that France must participate in the Genoa Conference, and he helped to arrange a meeting between the two Premiers at Boulogne, where the summary of the conference of Genoa was finally accepted by both. Although Poincaré could not avoid the participation of France in the proposed conference, he criticized the programme in a memorandum sent to the British Government in February. In this he insisted that the Treaties of the Peace Conference should not be modified in any particular and that the power and authority of the League of Nations were not to be used at the Conference of Genoa by dealing with any questions which did not come within the competence of the League. Nor did he himself go to Genoa, although he was Foreign Minister, so that Barthou, the Vice-Premier, was the chief French representative. It is important to bear in mind that intercourse between Poincaré and Lloyd George was never happy because the personalities of the two men were fundamentally out of sympathy.

By this date Lloyd George was beginning to feel the malign influence of the Conservatives who were trying to bring about the fall of the Coalition Government and, by a contrary process to that in *Æsop's fable*, substitute King Log for King Stork. The consciousness of the growing weakness of his position at home probably made Mr Lloyd George unduly sensitive about his prestige abroad, and at Genoa he created a general impression of overbearance. He got into his head that Dr Beneš was intriguing against him and in the end was inclined to blame him as one of the factors in the fiasco of the whole Conference. In point of fact Beneš was too much worried about the obvious tension that was developing between France and Great Britain to intrigue against Lloyd George. He did not think that Mr Lloyd George's plan for a guarantee pact which he laid before the Conference was a good one, providing as it did nothing except a promise that nobody would attack anybody else. Dr Beneš insisted that the only firm basis of European peace was a Franco-British guarantee pact which could be extended to become an inter-Allied pact and later a general European pact. Beneš had already sounded the other two members of the Little Entente about a mutual guarantee of support in case of German aggression; but Yugoslavia and Rumania, with an eye on the Czechoslovak frontiers, were disinclined to extend their

responsibility beyond Hungary unless that responsibility was part of a general European Pact. Therefore Beneš set his heart on a Great Entente pact based on the Franco-British pact to which he hoped later to join the Little Entente. Here he was over sanguine, and, indeed, for so accomplished a master of foreign affairs a little ingenuous. He should have known that Lloyd George even at the top of his power could never have succeeded in committing Great Britain to a Continental alliance in time of peace. The Americans had receded into the era of George Washington as soon as the Treaty of Versailles was signed, and the British were as much afraid of 'entangling alliances' as they were. For Dr Beneš to suppose that Lloyd George could perform the miracle in 1922 was letting his emotion for once in a way override his reason. Of course, his plan was rejected. In a speech he made to the Czechoslovak Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs on February 6th, 1924, he said of this rejection:

"My plan met with obstacles mainly because it was based upon a respect for existing international obligations. Lloyd George's proposal also fell through for the reason that it took no account of this last principle."

This sounds bitter, and suggests that Dr Beneš was angry about Lloyd George's policy at Genoa; and that Lloyd George nursed his grievance against Dr Beneš was only too obvious in his book *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*. It was not only about the Franco-British mutual guarantee that they fell out. There was also the solid front presented by the Little Entente with Poland at Genoa which gave them as a united force the effect of a Great Power. At the Peace Conference each had had to plead its case before Lloyd George like a schoolboy to a headmaster. Now at Genoa, when Dr Beneš could reasonably feel that as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Czechoslovak Republic and a Vice-President of the last Assembly of the League of Nations he was no longer *in statu pupillari*, Lloyd George was still inclined to treat the delegates of the smaller powers as schoolboys.

Finally, and perhaps this was the prime cause of Lloyd George's resentment against Dr Beneš, there was the Russian imbroglio.

It was Lloyd George's own idea that the Bolsheviks should be invited to Genoa. He had impressed upon Briand at Cannes the importance of getting the "real leaders of Russia" to attend the Conference, and Lloyd George is owed recognition for so courageous a step at a time when the many obtuse and fearful minds of conservatism were bound to use that step of his to their own political advantage. Beneš approved of Lloyd George's action, and

his influence in Paris was decisive in persuading Poincaré not to oppose it.

The Soviet Government accepted the invitation, and in March Lenin told the Communist Conference: "We go to Genoa not as Communists but as merchants seeking to widen our trade and to obtain for it favourable conditions." In this spirit Chicherin, the Russian Foreign Minister and leader of the Soviet Delegation, concluded at Rapallo on Easter Sunday (April 16th) a political and economic agreement with Rathenau, the German Foreign Minister. This thoroughly upset everybody and made the negotiations at the Conference, already difficult enough, more difficult than ever, so that in the end they fell through. Dr Beneš supported Lloyd George over inviting the Russians to Genoa but agreed with the French in withholding juridical recognition prior to their participation in the Conference. He wished to accord such recognition as a result of negotiations at Genoa. When these failed Dr Beneš went on to carry through a separate and strictly individual negotiation on behalf of Czechoslovakia for a commercial treaty with the Russians. This enraged Lloyd George, who found in it the final proof of Dr Beneš's duplicity. Beneš argued that the road towards juridical recognition was by way of commercial intercourse, and in view of what Lenin had declared was the object of the Soviet Delegation's participation in the Conference he was surely right. Beneš had loyally supported the French refusal of recognition without a settlement of all unsettled questions between the Soviets and Western Europe, and his negotiations for an economic agreement for the present and future did not in the least prejudice French action about the past. His object then was what it remained throughout those muddled and wasted years between the two world wars—complete settlement and real collaboration. He was convinced that Czechoslovakia was the link between the West and the East, and he was resolved to strengthen it in order to help that collaboration. He had the courage of his convictions. He paid for that courage at Munich. He will be repaid; indeed, he has already been repaid.

During the rest of 1922 and throughout 1923 Dr Beneš was incessantly busy over the various difficulties which as fast as they were weeded out from one corner of Europe cropped up in another. There was a tiresome recrudescence of boundary disputes between Poland and Czechoslovakia. The agitation for the Anschluss increased in Austria; but relations with Czechoslovakia were friendly, and Dr Beneš was chiefly responsible for securing help for the difficult Austrian situation with a Czechoslovak loan of 500 million crowns. Ruthenian autonomy

became a problem owing to the backwardness of the people's political and cultural development. Hitler's noisy gospel of the regeneration of Germany by force of arms had already begun to have a disturbing effect on the Sudeten Germans. The Slovak People's Party had already begun to agitate for autonomy. In October 1922 Dr Beneš was able to drop the burden of being Prime Minister and devote himself entirely to his job as Foreign Minister in the new Government formed by Dr Švehla.

The growing divergence of the British and French points of view over German reparations was a deep anxiety to Beneš. He believed that unanimity between the two countries was vital to peace in Europe. Poincaré's dislike of conferences and his inclination to use the League of Nations as a forcing house for French policy stimulated Beneš's hopes of increasing the League's influence. When the Council of the League was flouted by Mussolini after the iniquitous bombardment of the undefended island of Corfu Dr Beneš was chief spokesman for international decency. Those shots fired by the Italian warships in August 1923 were the first shots fired in the Second World War, and they were fired while the Council of the League was in session on the eve of the opening of the Assembly. The Greek Government had declared its willingness to accept the decision of the League Council on the dispute which had arisen over the murder of General Tellini, the Chief of an Allied Commission engaged on the delimitation of the Greco-Albanian frontier. The murder had, in fact, been planned by Mussolini himself to provide him with an incident: it was probably carried out by Albanians. Mussolini, disgracefully supported by at least one great English newspaper, threatened to withdraw the Italian representative from the League of Nations if it dared to maintain its right to act as arbiter between Italy and Greece, and in the end the Council accepted the decision of the Great Powers that it must lay its proposals before the Conference of Ambassadors, the mediation of which both parties agreed to accept. At first the Conference of Ambassadors accepted in full the recommendations of the League Council, but later they dishonourably abandoned the most important clause of the agreement which had been accepted by Greece and imposed a fine of 50 million liras, although not a shadow of evidence was produced which in the slightest degree inculpated the Greek Government. The whole proceedings reduced international justice to the level of the Federal authorities' efforts to deal with the lawlessness brought about by prohibition in the United States.

Throughout the year 1923 the incompatibility of the British and

French attitudes grew more obvious, and without doubt this was the primary cause of the marked deterioration of international affairs in every direction. Fortunately the Conservatives went out of office before the acrimonious exchanges between Curzon and Poincaré had brought Franco-British relations to an impasse; and Ramsay MacDonald, who became Prime Minister in the first Labour Government, managed to restore the atmosphere. In May, after the French elections, the Poincaré Government gave way to one formed by Herriot, with whom MacDonald at once established a much more cordial relationship.

Meanwhile, in December 1923, Dr Beneš had the satisfaction of signing a political treaty with France which had been initiated by the French Government and discussed throughout the year. This treaty, which was expressly based on the Covenant of the League of Nations, ensured for both States a common policy in Central Europe, particularly in the question of the restoration of the Habsburg and Hohenzollern dynasties, the loyal fulfilment of the Peace Treaties, and joint action in questions involving their common interests; it provided also for an appeal to a Court of Arbitration in any disputes which might arise between them.

At first this treaty roused suspicion in certain quarters, and this was deepened by the publication in Germany of secret military clauses, which, however, were shown at once to be clumsy forgeries. As usual Italy was the chief critic, because it was feared that such a treaty might stand in the way of Italian ambition to take the place of Austria in the counsels of Central Europe. Dr Beneš managed to allay this suspicion by a visit to Italy, the fruit of which was a treaty of cordial co-operation signed at Rome on May 28th, 1924, based like one previously concluded between Italy and Yugoslavia on the order established by the Treaties of Saint-Germain and Trianon.

With these two diplomatic triumphs to his credit Dr Beneš turned his attention to an ambitious plan, nothing less than the achievement of a European Entente based upon the Entente between Great Britain and France. That plan had been thwarted in one form at the Genoa Conference: he hoped to give it reality in another and better form through the League of Nations. The moment was propitious, with the MacDonald and Herriot Governments in power; and the famous Geneva Protocol was drafted. It is a remarkable document of some five thousand words, and the force of it lies in the ingenuity with which it provides at once for security, for progressive disarmament, and for the compulsory arbitration of international disputes. Moreover, it expressly

lays down by exact definition what constitutes an act of aggression. Beneš was chiefly responsible for the drafting of the security and disarmament sections, the lucid and subtle Greek Nicolas Politis for the incorporation of the provisions for such security and disarmament within the framework of practical international law. Under the Covenant of the League an ultimate right of war in certain cases was allowed. Under the Protocol the right of war was abolished unless called upon by the Council of the League to repress an act of aggression committed by the recalcitrant State. The principle of sanctions had already been accepted by signatories of the Covenant. What the Protocol did was to define more precisely the circumstances in which these measures should be co-operatively applied.

On September 1st, 1924—a date of ill-omen—the Fifth Assembly of the League of Nations was opened at Geneva. The British delegates were Ramsay MacDonald, Arthur Henderson, and Lord Parmoor, the last of whom had played an important part in the consultations about the drafting of the Protocol. Macdonald and Herriot had succeeded in restoring amity between their countries at the London Conference about reparations in July, and one of the reasons why Herriot was able to show himself so much less intransigent than Poincaré over reparations was the assurance he had received from Macdonald that Great Britain would support the Protocol. Herriot was at Geneva too. The Fifth Assembly was the most impressive tribute to its prestige that the League had yet received. Besides Macdonald and Herriot five other Prime Ministers attended as well as the Foreign Ministers of sixteen States.

By the time the Protocol was presented to the Assembly the Labour Government was tottering to its fall. On the same day—October 2nd, 1924—as the Protocol was agreed to by forty-nine nations, and signed by sixteen, including France, the Duke of Northumberland, presiding at the annual conference of the National Unionist Association, invited Mr Baldwin as Conservative leader to sound “a call to arms.” Mr Baldwin’s bugle rang out, a little flat, to proclaim that a settled and contented Germany was the most effective barrier of Western civilization against Bolshevik aggression. So early as September 10th at Penmaenmawr, Mr Lloyd George had been defying the Government to proceed with the ratification of the British and Russian trade treaty. By October 8th the Liberals had decided to help the Conservatives to turn the Labour Government out of office. In destroying that Labour Government they destroyed the Liberal Party. Mr Winston Churchill foresaw this result: on September 22nd he left an apparently still

seaworthy ship and swam ashore at Epping, wearing a Conservative lifebelt.

On October 28th, the anniversary of the Czechoslovak Republic and the day before the General Election which returned the Conservative party to power, Dr Beneš's enthusiasm secured from the Czechoslovak Parliament its ratification of the Protocol which with fifteen other nations the Czechoslovak Delegation had signed. Czechoslovakia was the only nation to ratify its signature. Other nations were waiting to see what Great Britain intended to do.

That December the Council of the League met in Rome to discuss among other things the Disarmament Conference which the Protocol had proposed should be held as soon as possible next year. Great Britain was represented by the new Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, who before he addressed the Council had a long interview with Mussolini. To the Council Austen Chamberlain said that his presence that day was a matter of some inconvenience to his colleagues, but that the new British Government was anxious to show its respect for the League, its high sense of the value of the work which the League had done, and the hopes it cherished for its future success. It was already clear, however, that the Protocol was being regarded with profound suspicion by the new British Government. A day or two later, in the House of Lords, Lord Parmoor impressed upon the Government the supreme importance of approving the Protocol. Lord Curzon in reply said that "the Government had already commenced their examination of the representations received from the Admiralty and other Departments. The examination would be close and prolonged, and he doubted if the investigations could be completed by next March, when, according to the papers, the Protocol was to be discussed by the League of Nations Council."¹

In March 1925 Austen Chamberlain on behalf of the British Government torpedoed the Geneva Protocol, and thereby made another world war certain as soon as the German people had been stirred up to the requisite pitch of hysterical fury of conquest and fear of encirclement to precipitate it.

Austen Chamberlain himself was strengthened in his determination to destroy the Protocol by the fact that he was in possession of a note from Germany sent the previous month on the initiative of Stresemann in which proposals were made for a possible security pact with France. In a debate in the House of Commons on the eve of his departure to Geneva Chamberlain had revealed these overtures and carefully

¹ *Annual Register*, 1924.

avoided any mention of the Protocol. When pressed by other speakers he announced in his reply to the debate that he had come to the conclusion that if Britain signed the Protocol to-morrow it would not settle the question of security.

There was no expectation at Geneva of Great Britain's acceptance of the Protocol; but the members of the League Council were not prepared for a pailful of such icy cold water as was poured over them. No wonder the *Annual Register* for 1925 records that "Mr Chamberlain's speeches made a painful impression on the delegates, who were hardly prepared for so complete a rejection of the Protocol on the part of Britain. It was immediately recognized by France that the Protocol had been killed, and that some new means would have to be devised of finding security. Accordingly, when Mr Chamberlain passed through Paris on his way back from Geneva, M. Herriot discussed with him the new situation that had been created. The conversations were most amicable, but they did not lead to any result beyond bringing into clearer relief the problems that had to be solved."

It was clear from Austen Chamberlain's answers to the criticism from the Opposition benches that the British Government was so much enamoured of direct negotiation with Germany as a way to peace that it was prepared to sacrifice all the rest of Europe to its own infatuation. Even Lloyd George, who complained of Austen Chamberlain's manner of rejecting the Protocol, denounced the Protocol itself as "a booby-trap for Britain, baited with arbitration." Perhaps he was still sore about Dr Beneš's imaginary intrigue against him at Genoa.

And so, with Austen Chamberlain as head gardener, Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Poland, and Czechoslovakia proceeded to lay out the fool's paradise of Locarno.

At Geneva Dr Beneš had traversed all Austen Chamberlain's arguments against the Protocol, but when he sat down he knew by the silence of other Members of the Council that the Protocol was dead. He was never a man afraid to face facts, however unpleasant they might be, and his eternal optimism at once inspired him to make the best of the Locarno negotiations. He persuaded himself that the Locarno Treaties coupled with the Franco-Polish and Franco-Czechoslovak Treaties of 1924 might preserve peace. Yet his logical mind must have warned him that the British fear of the Protocol indicated a moral laziness in Great Britain which might involve Europe in disaster, however magnificently after the disaster she would strive to repair the harm done. It had happened in 1914. It could happen, all too easily, again. Dr Beneš and Count Skrzynski, the Polish Foreign Minister,

drew closer. The refusal of Germany to sign an Eastern Pact on the lines of the Western Pact, and thereby guarantee help for Poland and Czechoslovakia on the same terms as for France and Belgium, was ominous. The election of Hindenburg to succeed Ebert as President, the violent criticism of Stresemann for his policy of an understanding with the Western Powers, even the proposal to reintroduce the old black, white, and red colours for her flag—these did not indicate a genuinely pacific Germany. So Beneš and Skrzynski drew closer. On April 23rd an Arbitration Treaty was signed at Warsaw between their two countries which promised to heal the sores made by irritants like Teschen and Javorina.

On December 1st, 1925, the Locarno Treaties were signed in Downing Street. Mr Austen Chamberlain was made a Knight of the Garter; Mrs Chamberlain was made a Dame Grand Cross of the British Empire; the room in the Foreign Office where the delegates signed was called the Locarno Room; and when the German delegates emerged into Downing Street a large crowd "raised their hats respectfully" to them.

Sir Austen Chamberlain in a series of subsequent speeches would never fail to mention that the hatchet had now been buried: the hatchet buried in that fool's paradise was, in fact, merely the rake with which he had made the surface of Europe look smooth. Sir Austen Chamberlain was so much inclined to bask in his popularity that Mr Baldwin in a public tribute had to remind him that "the team-work of the Cabinet had also been a factor of no small importance." No doubt the reflection that there was a cricket-pitch in that fool's paradise made the future appear more secure than ever.

It must be admitted that Dr Beneš himself, who was one of the signatories, appeared just as optimistic as Sir Austen Chamberlain. This may have been due partly to Briand's influence. Briand had supported the Protocol in an eloquent speech at Geneva, and he had—as it seemed—no difficulty in persuading Beneš that the Locarno Treaties were a step forward towards the goal of arbitration, security, and disarmament at which they both aimed. So they agreed on a fresh Franco-Czechoslovak treaty of guarantee by which France bound herself to come to the aid of Czechoslovakia immediately in the event of an unprovoked recourse to arms. "Our former treaty with France thus acquires an entirely new character without losing any of its old effectiveness," Dr Beneš, stressing the word 'immediately,' told the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czechoslovak Parliament when he returned to Prague.

The Treaty was signed at Locarno in the presence of Stresemann and Austen Chamberlain, and it was registered with the League of Nations at the same time as the so-called Rhine Pact of the Treaty of Locarno and the Franco-Polish treaty. The intention of the signatories was to underline by such simultaneous action with the pen that, in the event of war with Germany, Britain, France, Poland, and Czechoslovakia would show equally simultaneous action with the sword.

CHAPTER XV

THE difficulty of seeing the wood for the trees in a study of Dr Beneš will confront every biographer who has to compress his material into a readableness that does not demand an expert knowledge of foreign affairs to make it readable. Indeed, Dr Beneš himself experienced that difficulty when he wrote the remarkable book that is called in English *My War Memoirs*. The number and variety of major and minor complications which he has for ever engaged in simplifying almost baffled his power of clear exposition. There are moments when he seems to be disappearing from men's eyes in a turbulent ocean of paper. To record all his peripatetic and multifarious activities in the vast field of foreign affairs will leave an impression of a blue book darting over Europe like a dragon-fly, and in any case merely to catalogue those activities without comment would demand a book far more voluminous than this can be.

In 1926 Germany was admitted to the League of Nations and Poland objected to Germany's having a permanent seat on the Council unless she had one too. Spain and Brazil also wanted permanent seats, and Brazil left the League altogether when her demand was turned down. It was suggested that Sweden might retire and give Poland her place, but Stresemann objected that this would give the Council too much French influence since Poland, Belgium, and Czechoslovakia would always vote with France. Dr Beneš when he heard of the difficulty at once offered to resign his seat, after he had consulted the other two members of the Little Entente whose representatives he was on the Council.

The complication was solved by the creation of some semi-permanent seats on the Council, and at Stresemann's particular request, Dr Beneš presided instead of him, whose right it was, at the first session of the Council on September 16th, 1926. As Chairman he welcomed the German representative with an obvious warmth of sincerity.

When the Assembly met later in the month Beneš made the opening speech and was elected to a seat on the Council, although the Rumanian delegate already represented the Little Entente on it. The election of Beneš was avowedly the expression of the League's gratitude for the work he had done on it, for it, and with it.

From Prague, Masaryk telegraphed:

"Your news gives me great pleasure and it must give you pleasure also. You have won the approbation of Europe, of the world indeed, by your ability, your honesty, your conciliatory and patient character. You have succeeded in giving concrete shape and practical effect to our Czech programme of humanitarianism. You have conducted your policy at home and abroad in accordance with the ideas of Havlíček, in accordance with his policy of reason and right. Every honourable citizen of our State capable of thought will feel happy and consoled by this grateful testimonial you have received. It is stamped by truth. Cordially salute for me Briand, Chamberlain, Cecil, Stresemann, and Nincic."

This telegram, so characteristic of Masaryk, was intended to express his contempt for the attacks against Beneš which had been kept up all the year by a small but noisy minority of quasi-Fascists, with whom a certain number of reactionaries from the Liberals and Agrarians had allied themselves. The leaders were a General degraded for treason and an ex-Minister impeached for corruption.

At the commemoration of the death of John Hus as a national anniversary on July 6th, 1925, the Papal Nuncio had quitted Prague. It is doubtful whether he acted on his own initiative or by orders from the Vatican, but naturally the Curia had to support him, and protracted negotiations went on which ended in a *modus vivendi* being reached in December 1927, much to the relief of Dr Beneš, whose earlier anti-clericalism directed against the Vatican as the prime upholder of the Habsburg Empire had been so greatly mitigated that by now he was suspected by some socialists of being tainted with Catholicism! The humanitarian democracy of Masaryk and Beneš was still very much at the mercy of parochial politics.

That year 1927 was not too auspicious for the prospects of a peaceful and united Europe. Mussolini was engaged in directing Italian policy towards the insensate plan of taking the place of Austria in Central Europe. The Treaty of Tirana with Albania in November 1926 was followed in April 1927 by a Treaty of Arbitration and Friendship with Hungary. This was countered in November by a Treaty of Arbitration and Friendship between France and Yugoslavia. Meanwhile, the late Lord Rothermere's admiration for Mussolini led him to publish a series of articles in the *Daily Mail* demanding a revision of the Treaty of Trianon in favour of the Magyars. The hysteria they evoked in Hungary warned the Little Entente how close the fires were to the surface and drew the three countries close again. Eighteen months earlier Beneš had tried to persuade Yugoslavia and Rumania to take

concerted action over the forgery of the French bank-notes by the Hungarian State Cartographical Institute at the instigation of Prince Windischgrätz, an ex-Minister. It was believed in France that German monarchists were behind the Hungarian nobleman and that the forgeries were to finance a plan to foment revolution in the Succession States. Yugoslavia and Rumania did not think they were involved and were disinclined to associate themselves with Czechoslovakia in the matter. After Lord Rothermere's articles they supported Beneš, and the forgeries were regarded as an Italo-Hungarian plot to subsidize the revisionist agitation. There had been similar forgeries of Czechoslovak notes in 1921.

Dr Beneš succeeded, not without some pressure, in eliciting from Sir Austen Chamberlain a declaration that the British Government had no intention of considering a revision of the Peace Treaties. That no doubt was true. Austen Chamberlain was so deeply infatuated with his own achievement over the Locarno Treaties that he believed as fervidly as Neville Chamberlain would believe eleven years later that peace in our time was in his waistcoat pocket. It is melancholy to turn over the pages of history in the twenties and realize how fatally British statesmanship during that decade softened the ground for the final collapse of British statesmanship in the thirties.

Lord Robert Cecil could stand no more of it. In 1927 he resigned from the Government on account of its policy. In his letter of resignation, which the Cabinet tried to keep from the public, "he retailed the occasions on which the Government had failed to seize an opportunity of making an advance in the direction of security, arbitration, and disarmament—the refusal to accept the Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the unconditional rejection of the Protocol, the Ministerial declaration against compulsory arbitration. . . ."¹

It was not surprising that when Sir Austen Chamberlain went to Geneva in September he "found that Great Britain was in ill repute among the mass of the delegates as the 'obstacle to disarmament,' or that his vigorous and outspoken defence against the charge" in the course of which he "declined firmly and somewhat bluntly the invitation of the Dutch delegate to reopen the consideration of the Protocol . . . made a painful impression on many of his hearers," of whom Dr Beneš was certainly one of those most painfully impressed.

However, Mr Baldwin, speaking not at Geneva but at the annual Guildhall banquet on November 9th, expressed his profound satisfaction with the international situation. With an exquisite fatuity "he declared

¹ *Annual Register*, 1927.

himself to be an optimist because he was a realist . . . he called on statesmen in the Balkans, in Central and Eastern Europe to follow the example of M. Briand and Herr Stresemann. Of Russia he could not speak so hopefully, but he could say that whenever the Russians were prepared to observe the ordinary decencies of international intercourse they would find England ready to meet them in that spirit of liberality and goodwill which inspired her whole foreign policy."

Dr Beneš, who for nine years had been showing an impeccable example to M. Briand and Herr Stresemann, might have felt that Mr Baldwin was teaching his grandmother to suck eggs, and he might have called on Mr Baldwin to abstain from sending to Geneva a Foreign Minister whose monocle was all too symbolic of the one-eyed approach to Europe which perceived only the West and was blind to the East. Not that Beneš himself had yet begun seriously to tackle the problem of Russian relations. He was content at present to do nothing that would complicate it. In justice to Mr Baldwin one must add that at the Guildhall banquet next year he did declare that "Czechoslovakia under the wise direction of M. Masaryk and M. Beneš had set an example to the new States. Her financial policy and wise foreign policy were a model to all, and Czechoslovakia was one of the most stable elements in Central Europe."¹

In that winter of 1927 the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference planned for Geneva in some year ahead began to sit on December 1st. Dr Beneš was a member of this Commission, and he was also elected President of the Committee of Security and Arbitration.

The year 1928 opened rather ominously with the seizure on the Austrian frontier of some truckloads of war material despatched from Italy to Hungary. Beneš urged upon the Council of the League the need to send a commission of investigation, and in the end the material was declared not to be important. Nevertheless, the incident created apprehension—particularly in France, where Italian interference in Central Europe was not regarded with enthusiasm.

In May Esmond Harmsworth visited 120 Hungarian towns and was given a rapturous welcome. It was proposed to build a Temple of Revision decorated with the Rothermere arms. However, when Lord Rothermere in a Christmas message suggested the introduction of more liberal institutions into Hungary "the fervour of his admirers cooled considerably, and the Fascist-nationalists gave vent to their feelings in acts of rank discourtesy."²

¹ *Annual Register*, 1928.

² *Annual Register*, 1928.

Dr Beneš has been repeatedly charged with intolerance towards Hungary; but the Magyars were not conspicuously susceptible to reason. Hungary was at the mercy of landed proprietors: that is what stood in the way of federation with Czechoslovakia, which was the obvious solution of Hungary's economic difficulties. Perhaps the ruin that has followed the Second World War will teach the Magyars the lesson that a thousand years had failed to teach them.

The year 1928 was that of the Briand-Kellogg Pact. At the Quai d'Orsay fifteen nations led by Germany signed a treaty renouncing war and agreeing that "the settlement and solution of all disputes or conflicts of whatever nature or on whatever origin they may be, which may arise among them, shall never be sought except by pacific means."

With the exception of Ireland, every one of the signatory nations ultimately went to war, led by Germany; but Dr Beneš, the final signatory, did sacrifice himself exactly ten years later to avoid war.

Sir Austen Chamberlain, who sent Lord Cushendun to sign instead of going to Paris himself, had warned the House of Commons "not to entertain exaggerated expectations. The Kellogg Pact might mean much for the peace of the world, or it might mean very little." It was rather too soon after Locarno for Sir Austen not to feel that Mr Kellogg was trying to steal the bride's garter.

Two weeks before the Pact was signed the Air Force arranged a mimic attack on London from the East, and a number of "aeroplanes succeeded in penetrating the defences and dropping about 200 tons of bombs on London." The conclusion drawn was that "London was too big to be adequately defended, and in a short time the vital points of the city would be in ruins, and gas would render the other parts uninhabitable. The reports of the Air Ministry . . . made a deep impression on the general public, and gave a great impetus to the movement for the arbitration of war."¹

In Germany the Pact was signed without enthusiasm owing to the disappointment that no steps had as yet been taken by the other parties at Locarno towards disarmament, while the Germans themselves were secretly rearming.

After the signature of the Pact Dr Beneš paid his first official visit to Berlin and returned to Prague "very happy to announce that the conversations had taken place in an atmosphere of the greatest frankness and in the most friendly spirit, with the knowledge that there no longer existed between the two countries any vital contentious issues."¹

¹ *Annual Register*, 1928.

² Speech to Foreign Affairs Committee of Czechoslovak Parliament.

Dr Beneš, however, did not reveal then that he had warned Stresemann not to make an 'anschluss' with Austria because such a step would involve Europe six months later in a crisis that would be followed by war. Nor did he reveal that he had rejected Dr Schacht's proposal to create an economic Central-European Union between Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. That such plans could be put forward at this date is further evidence of the extent to which Stresemann was a forerunner of Hitler.

Nevertheless, Dr Beneš preserved the appearance of optimism, and in support of such optimism it could be noted that the German minority seemed more ready at this time than it ever had been to co-operate with the Czechs to the advantage of the State. Two German deputies accepted office in the Government.

At the end of the year Dr Beneš visited Paris, where he assisted at the unveiling of a commemorative plaque upon the house in the Rue Bonaparte which had been the nursery of the Czechoslovak Republic.

The year 1929 marked for Dr Beneš an intensification of the attacks upon him by the Czech and Slovak Fascists with encouragement from one group of Agrarians and led to the Court of Honour to decide in his favour the political and personal dispute between him and Dr Kramář. As an offset to so much unpleasantness at home he was elected a member of the French Academy of Moral and Political Science. Masaryk was already a member, and so Czechoslovakia now occupied two out of the ten *fauteuils* reserved for illustrious foreigners.

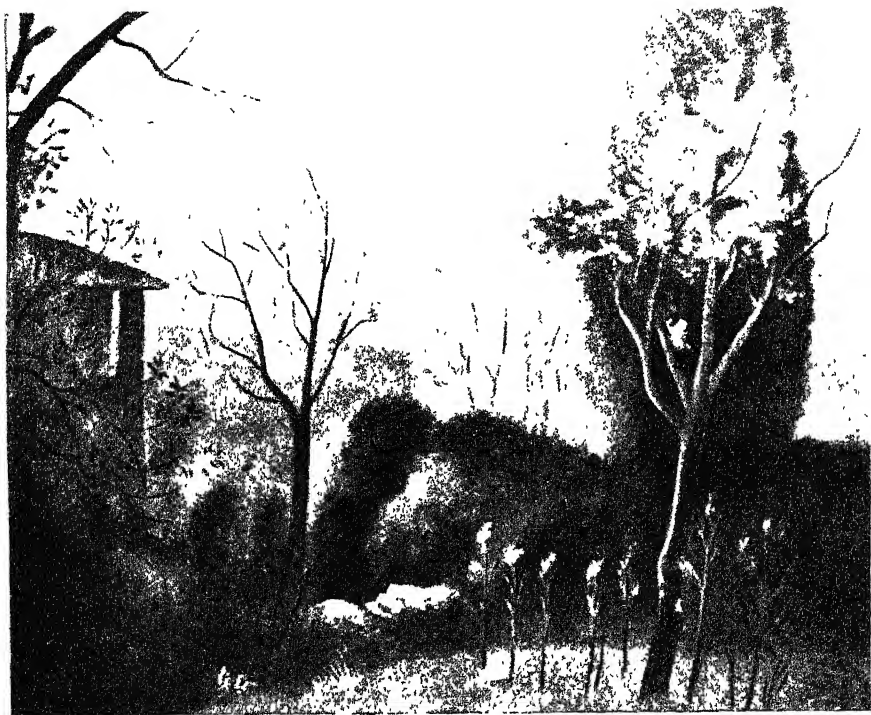
Significantly, after a visit to Budapest of Grandi, the Italian Foreign Minister, Magyar revisionism was more noisy than ever, and with Mussolini denouncing the treaty of arbitration between Italy and Yugoslavia the Little Entente drew still closer together. Grandi visited Hungary again in 1930, after which Mussolini made a speech in support of revisionism of the crudest talk-firing type. He had already praised at Florence "the stern and warlike face of Italy" and declared that although "words are beautiful things; rifles, machine-guns, ships, aeroplanes, and cannon are still more beautiful." At the German elections Hitler's National Socialists polled nearly 6½ million votes and became the second strongest party. "Hitler greeted his victory with the significant words 'Heads will roll. . . .'" Europe was in the middle of the economic depression.

Small wonder that Beneš warmly welcomed Briand's proposal for the United States of Europe and was glad to serve on the committee convened by the League of Nations to study the plan. His work on



BOHEMIAN LANDSCAPE

Water-colour by Václav Špála (1885-1946).



GARDEN

Oil painting by Otakar Coubine (*b.* 1883).

the committee that was preparing the way for the Disarmament Conference had not given much encouragement even to his superabundant optimism. Thanks chiefly to Beneš's indefatigable nursing of the Little Entente Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Rumania presented a united front at the Reparations Conference at the Hague, when Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labour Government, rebuked French financial policy so harshly.

It was in 1930 that Masaryk's eightieth birthday was celebrated by the whole nation with immense fervour and profound accord. Parliament passed a law consisting of the words "Thomas G. Masaryk has deserved well of the State," and these words were engraved in marble over the Speaker's Chair in both Chambers. Nevertheless, the personal attacks on Dr Beneš continued savagely. It did not seem to occur to his opponents that the President could hardly have deserved well of the State if his chief lieutenant deserved so badly of it.

The economic depression deepened over Europe. The next two years involved Dr Beneš in what, if set out in detail, would seem an almost frenzied activity of effort to cement a Europe that was rapidly crumbling.

When the Disarmament Conference assembled at Geneva in February 1932, of which he had been elected to the exacting position of *rapporteur*, Japan had already defied the League over Manchuria, and disarmament was a jack-o'-lantern. As *rapporteur* Beneš during that spring had individual discussions with the representatives of country after country. From the start the difficulty was Germany, who demanded equality, or, in other words, the right to increase her armaments and withdraw. In his anxiety to achieve something Beneš supported conditionally the German demand to be granted equality in course of time. At last, after nearly a year of negotiation, the five Great Powers signed a declaration in December 1932, recognizing the German claim to equality without delay and the French demand for security.

As might be expected, Dr Beneš played a leading part in the fight for the prestige of the League, which was seriously affected by the Japanese attitude. "Czechoslovakia is concerned in this serious problem solely as a member of the League," he affirmed. "She is anxious regarding the results of our present action; she desires the League to fulfil all its obligations, deriving, not only from the Covenant, but from the moral prestige it at present possesses throughout the world. She desires that the League, which in spite of all represents a new spirit and quite a new method in international relations, shall prove that it is useful and, indeed, indispensable to the maintenance of peace."

He had been made a D.C.L. by the University of Oxford in the autumn of 1929; but an honorary doctorate of law is not much consolation for the toleration of international lawlessness by one of that University's most distinguished lawyers. Sir John Simon, as Foreign Minister, cautioned Parliament against prejudging the case against Japan. The fact was that no great Power was prepared to intervene, and therefore the Manchurian outrage would have to go the way of Mussolini's outrage against Greece. With no Great Power willing to give a moral lead it was all too easy to condemn the League of Nations as a collection of academic busybodies. Beneš was dejected by the League's position; but not even his long sight can have seen far enough into the future to know that despair, not dejection, was the emotion justified.

The effect of Hitler's probable accession to power was so disturbing in Austria and in Hungary that the Foreign Ministers of the Little Entente considered the necessity of strengthening it, and a fortnight after Hitler became Chancellor (on January 30th, 1933) Jevtič, Titulescu, and Beneš signed what was known as the Statute of the Little Entente at Geneva on February 16th, which provided for a Permanent Council of the States formed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the respective countries under an obligation to meet at least three times a year. Every political treaty of each State, every unilateral act changing the political situation of one of the Little Entente States in regard to an outside State, and every economic agreement involving important political consequences was made conditional on the unanimous consent of the Permanent Council. A secretariat of the Permanent Council was to be appointed with its seat in the capital of the acting President and one section always located at the seat of the League of Nations at Geneva. The common policy of the Permanent Council was to be inspired by the general principles contained in all the great political pacts concluded since the war, and was to be within the principles and regulations of the League of Nations. An economic council was to be instituted. The Treaties of Alliance between the respective partners of the Little Entente were to be renewed for an indefinite period.

That remarkable statesman Titulescu, whose death was a loss to Europe, was one of the signatories. He and Dr Beneš worked in the most complete accord, and there is no doubt that both he and Titulescu were already looking forward to making this organization Pact a vehicle for establishing relations between the Little Entente and Russia. It was clear that Mussolini intended to foment trouble in Central Europe, and there was reason to feel sure that the Italian was already

intriguing tentatively with Germany, though holding back until he saw the real strength of Hitler. Provisionally Mussolini was trying out his scheme for a Four Power Pact between Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, which the Little Entente naturally regarded with suspicion as an attempt to arrange European affairs over the heads of the smaller States.

The Four-Power Pact was proposed to Ramsay MacDonald and Sir John Simon by Mussolini himself in Rome, and included in its purposes was to be a revision of the Peace Treaties. MacDonald fell for the idea, and put it before the House of Commons as soon as he returned to London. He was attacked by Mr Winston Churchill for having brought Great Britain nearer to war by his interventions in foreign affairs during the last four years and defended by Mr Anthony Eden, who stigmatized Mr Churchill's observations as "a mischievous absurdity."

Naturally the smaller Powers were not at all enthusiastic at the prospect of having their frontiers arbitrarily changed by the four Great Powers, and at Geneva Beneš was able to rouse the indignation of the League of Nations at being overridden like this. More effectively, perhaps, he used his influence in Paris, and when in June 1933 the Four-Power Pact was signed there was hardly anything in it about revision. In fact, it was just another collection of pious aspirations.

Dr Beneš had tried hard to persuade Poland to associate herself with the Little Entente in their negotiations against the Four-Power Pact, but Poland would insist on regarding herself as a Great Power and expected the Little Entente, which as a whole was just as much a Great Power as Poland, to let her take the lead. Moreover, Polish foreign affairs were by now in the hands of Colonel Beck, and although on the surface relations with Germany were not too friendly, there is no doubt that Beck had already gone a long way in committing his country to the ten-year Non-Aggression Pact signed in Berlin on January 21st, 1934.

The year 1933 was a bad year for the League of Nations. Japan left it in March. Germany went in October. In December Mussolini proposed to dissolve the League and reconstruct it on the base of his original Four-Power Pact. The German withdrawal was prompted, so the Germans protested, by a speech of Sir John Simon on October 14th at the Disarmament Conference in which he charged Germany with having shifted her ground in the course of the preceding weeks. The German Delegation at once withdrew from the Conference, and immediately afterwards Germany gave notice of her intention to resign her member-

ship of the League of Nations. This was the golden moment to deal with Germany; but the British Prime Minister, all too tender to the public mood, made a tearful appeal to Germany's better nature to come back and talk about disarmament without "forfeiting either honour or self-respect." The Labour Opposition accused the Government of bellicosity, which was on a par with the charge laid against Mr Pickwick at Ipswich of intending to fight a duel, and the level of argument indulged in by the Labour speakers in the debate seldom rose above that of Mr Nupkins. Yet the infatuated voters of East Fulham proceeded, on the strength of the alleged bellicosity of perhaps the feeblest British Government that ever held power, to elect a peace-bleating Labour candidate in the East Fulham by-election, turning a minority of 14,581 into a majority of 4840. That was on October 26th. The result shook the Conservative Party, and Mr Baldwin would announce two years later that, although they knew that Germany was rearming, they could not risk going to the country with a mandate to rearm against the menace because they would have lost a general election. Thus the indirect responsibility for the Second World War is placed upon both the Left and the Right, and it would take Justice herself to measure against which of the two the scales declare the heavier weight of guilt. In fact, the electorate itself was guilty, and recriminations against politicians are a vanity. So much did the country wish to avoid war that Labour gained 200 seats at the municipal elections by denouncing the Government as war-mongers—a curious prophylactic.

The German and Polish Pact of Non-Aggression concluded in January 1934 was as much a disaster for Europe as it was for Poland, because it gave Poland a sense of security that a wiser statesmanship would have realized was unjustified. It is said that Pilsudski and Beck approached France in 1933 with a view to taking strong action against Germany after Hitler's becoming Chancellor, and that their suggestion was turned down; but in the summer of 1932, before he succeeded Zalewski as Foreign Minister, Beck was already intriguing with Germany, much to the disapproval of majority opinion in Poland. Be that as it may, Poland turned away from France. She started bickering again with Czechoslovakia. She promoted Slovak intrigues in the interest of the Magyars because Pilsudski wanted a common frontier with Hungary. She placed every possible difficulty in the way of bringing Russia into the concert of Europe. The Eastern Locarno Pact proposed by the French was to be a Pact of Mutual Assistance between Germany, Russia, Poland, the Baltic States, and Czechoslovakia; Germany and Poland refused to consider it. Perhaps if Great

Britain had agreed to join in this Eastern Pact Poland might have consented, in which case Hitler would have been compelled to give away his hand. However, speculations about what might have been are idle because Nazi morality does not admit an old-fashioned concept like the sanctity of international agreements, and the refusal of the other nations to be convinced of this until proof upon proof had been accumulated makes the enumeration of pacts that were signed and pacts that were never signed an exasperating futility.

In 1934 Russia was growing nervous. "The policy of militant National Socialism, impregnated with reactionary desires and predatory imperialist aims has opposed the Russian policy of universal peace," said Molotov early in the year. An attack by Germany and Poland on the west coinciding with an attack by Japan in the east was what Russia feared. The Turkish Ambassador in Tokio had been approached by the Japanese Foreign Office, offering Turkey a free hand in the Caucasus, a number of naval units, and help with fortifications on the Bosphorus if she would stand aside from the struggle between Japan and Russia timed for 1935. The Turkish Government declined. Similar approaches in Berlin and Warsaw were not so unfavourably received. The Soviet Government was warned by the Turks of these overtures, and during the session of the Disarmament Conference at the end of May Litvinov appealed for a better way of securing peace than partial disarmament.

Dr Beneš, knowing that the Soviet Government had already sounded France about the prospects of resuming the old alliance in another form and recognizing the tremendous reinforcement of the League that Russian membership would give, took the opportunity to bring the Little Entente into relations with Russia, and by obtaining a formal renunciation of Russian claims to Bessarabia was able to enjoy the support of Titulescu. It was felt that Russia could not be expected to apply formally to join the League. So Litvinov retired coyly to a village near Geneva, where in September he received a telegram signed by the representatives of thirty States inviting Russia to join the League. Litvinov consulted Moscow to find out if the invitation was sufficiently cordial. Moscow decided that it was, and at last after so many years Russia took a permanent seat on the Council as befitted her dignity. The whole of the negotiations about the entry of the Soviets into the League were made between Litvinov and Beneš, who at this date was President of the Council of the League and acted as its representative. The only opposition to the entry of the Soviets came from Colonel Beck.

Soon, besides the real beginnings of a resumption of Franco-Russian

intimacy, it was evident that an intellectual and cultural awakening in Russia was setting in. Masaryk and Beneš at last beheld their dream of making Czechoslovakia the link between West and East coming true. And then Stalin's great friend and chief lieutenant Kirov was assassinated on December 1st. It was not going to be easy to convert the old Bolsheviks to Stalin's patriotism. The purge began.

In May 1934 Masaryk was re-elected President, but soon afterwards he had a stroke, and it was evident that he would not be able to undergo the burden of office much longer. Moreover, the sky over Europe was darkening all the time. Masaryk knew that the only man capable of taking the helm was Beneš and he deferred his resignation in order to achieve if possible unanimity in the election of his successor.

Dr Beneš had to decide whether the German or the Italian menace to the peace of Central Europe was more serious. Even now, ten years later, it is impossible to know certainly whether Hitler and Mussolini began to work to a common plan after that meeting in Venice a fortnight before Hitler ordered the massacre of June 30th, and if so with how much genuine accord. Probably at first the Italian believed he could easily double-cross the German when it suited him. It is certain that Mussolini was backing Dolfuss all through the first half of the year. He accused Czechoslovakia of helping the Austrian Socialists whom Dolfuss insanely destroyed. He was continuously feeding the revisionist ambitions of a Magyar Government that was conspicuously reactionary even for Hungary. He obviously aspired to a Danubian hegemony. Yet it looks as if he became gradually more nervous of Hitler's potentiality and decided that he himself would be incapable of building a breakwater strong enough to stand against the surge of the Pan-German tide. In any judgment of Mussolini it is important always to remember that he was a moral coward and that his self-confidence was always dependent on his ability to stimulate his adrenal glands by histrionic emotion. The massing of Italian troops at the Brenner is supposed to have deterred Hitler from marching into Austria after the assassination of Dolfuss on July 25th. The fact is that Hitler was not nearly ready for war. Moreover, Mussolini knew that Italian opinion was not prepared for overt action in support of Germany. It may be to ascribe an unwarrantable subtlety to Mussolini's policy to fancy that in 1934 he was already playing with the idea of destroying France in partnership with Hitler; but it is conceivable.

In April Barthou, the French Foreign Minister, had visited Warsaw, where his reception had been cold. Colonel Beck, under the influence of the Ten Years Non-Aggression Pact with Germany and the gratifying

anxiety of the Russians to sign a similar pact, wanted to impress on France that Poland considered herself just as much a Great Power as France and was disinclined any longer to be regarded as incapable of an independent policy. From Warsaw Barthou had gone on to Prague, where the warmth of his welcome had been extreme. In June Barthou had reached Bucharest and met Titulescu, Jevtič, and Beneš, and there French solidarity with the Little Entente had been impressively confirmed. Events in Austria during July led the French to suppose that a *rapprochement* with Italy was now feasible, and the visit of King Alexander of Yugoslavia to France in October was intended to pave the way for the establishment of better relations between Italy and Yugoslavia. Mussolini decided to force the issue and plotted the assassination of the King, with the help of Hungary. It is to be noted that ten days after the assassination, in which Barthou also was killed, General Gömbös, the semi-dictator of Hungary, visited Warsaw and was received with very marked honour. He had a long talk with Pilsudski, according to the official *communiqué*, on the subject of exchanging Polish and Hungarian professors, which was obviously so absurd a topic for two such men that it roused a good deal of suspicion, and the Opposition Press in Poland sharply criticized the whole business. Certainly one of the results of this visit was collaboration between Poland and Hungary to the disadvantage of Czechoslovakia.

It looks as if Mussolini's idea was to bring together Poland, Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria, to hand over Bohemia, Moravia, and Austria to Germany, to break up Yugoslavia, to give Croatia and Slovakia to Hungary, thus reconciling the Magyars to the loss of Transylvania, and to reward Bulgaria with Macedonia.

Dr Beneš has been blamed for his obstinate refusal to hear a word in favour of revision. What he realized was that once the principle of revision was accepted there was no limit to what might ensue for Europe.

In the first week of the year 1935 Mr Anthony Eden declared that it would be the most challenging year in post-war history. "It will show whether we can make the League—the collective system—effective, or whether nations are determined to pursue a selfish course." It certainly did.

It was in the first week of 1935 that Laval, the French Foreign Minister, went to Rome and signed agreements with Mussolini which seemed to effect a reasonable compromise between their two countries over African questions. It can be presumed that Laval learned then of

Mussolini's intention to force matters in Abyssinia and decided that Abyssinia was a much less dangerous toy for the Duce than Austria and Hungary.

On March 16th Germany reintroduced conscription, and almost simultaneously the heavy weapons forbidden by the Treaty of Versailles made their appearance in mass. Germany had been secretly rearming since 1919, as the French Government had always insisted to what seemed the deliberate scepticism of the British Government. Without consulting the French Government the British Government now sent a curiously feeble note of protest, which was followed by a visit to Hitler by Sir John Simon and Mr Anthony Eden. Hitler informed the Foreign Secretary that he would have nothing to do with an Eastern Pact, that he had no interest in a collective system of security, that he would give no guarantees about Austria, that he would not withdraw the conscription order, and that Germany had now achieved parity with Great Britain in the air. With this bag of indigestible nuts Sir John Simon returned to London, and Mr Eden went on to Moscow, where he had a cordial reception and found Stalin a good deal more in sympathy with his point of view about the European future than the chimera of Berlin. From Moscow Mr Eden proceeded to Warsaw, where the Poles were adamant on the subject of an Eastern Pact, and from Warsaw Mr Eden reached Prague, where, needless to say, Dr Beneš was completely reasonable, the most important subject of discussion being the direction of Hitler's pan-German expansion.

The French, irritated by the British handling of the conscription order, brought it before the Council of the League of Nations, which censured the German unilateral repudiation of an agreement and recommended that measures should be taken against States that indulged in unilateral repudiations which imperilled the peace of Europe. So little sympathy did this point of view command in England that in the House of Lords, a Labour peer, Lord Dickinson, moved a resolution deprecating the censure of the League Council and calling on the Government to "resume negotiations with that country on lines acceptable to the German people." Lord Rennell, ignoring the fact that Germany had withdrawn from the League, said it was unfortunate that judgment should have been passed on Germany without hearing what she had to say. Lord Mottistone "affirmed from his own personal knowledge that the German people desired nothing more than peace and friendship with Britain."

On May 2nd France and Russia signed a Pact of Mutual Assistance valid for five years, which the High Contracting Parties drafted wholly

within the framework of the League of Nations, agreeing to submit any conflict to the consideration of the Council of the League.

Dr Beneš, who had been watching with pleasure the Franco-Russian rapprochement, had prepared the way for his next great diplomatic achievement. In January 1935 a large party of Czechoslovak journalists had visited Moscow and been cordially entertained by the Soviet authorities. On March 25th a Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between Czechoslovakia and Soviet Russia had been signed at Prague which secured valuable transit rights for Czechoslovak goods to the Far East. On the other side Russia had been furnished with a credit for 250 million crowns.

Then on May 16th, exactly a fortnight after the Franco-Russian Pact, a similar pact was signed between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union which provided for mutual assistance in the event of aggression on either party *if* the victim of the aggression was assisted by France.

A general election took place in Czechoslovakia three days later, the conspicuous feature of which was the gain of 22 seats by what was called the Sudeten German Party, led by Konrad Henlein. It now held 44 out of the 66 German seats and became after the Czech Agrarians the second largest party in the Chamber. This success was attributed to economic distress among the Germans of northern Bohemia—the aftermath of the depression into which all Europe had been plunged more or less deeply. There was a more serious aspect to it, for although Henlein protested his party's loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic its affinity with the Nazis of the Reich was unmistakable, and after the activities of the Nazis in Austria during the previous year it was impossible not to feel apprehensive about developments in Czechoslovakia. Goebbels had started his propaganda about the Bolshevik sympathies of Czechoslovakia before the Mutual Assistance Pact with Russia was signed, and, of course, after the signature this propaganda was intensified.

In June 1935 Dr W. Koch, who had been German Minister in Prague for fourteen years, was retired from the Service. This was ominous because Dr Koch had worked unceasingly for collaboration between the two nations. Dr Beneš's formal speech of farewell reflects his feeling that with Dr Koch his hopes of reasonable behaviour at the Wilhelmstrasse were going too.

"Permit me, Mr Minister," he said, "to emphasize these undeniable facts: in the past fourteen years of post-war politics we have frequently had the opportunity of confirming in complete agreement that between our two States there are no direct conflicts or material for such. We

have, however, been aware of the important circumstances that the effects of the general European situation have been likely to create considerable difficulties in the path of our friendly relations. But, in each such case I have found that, in complete harmony with my attitude, you have always adopted a course calculated speedily to reduce the difficulties and have found a way and method by which a solution, preserving the dignity of both States, could promptly be achieved. You have always laid most emphasis on those things which we have in common and which help us to co-operate, rather than the things that might tend to separate us. You have, too, always emphasized the mutual respect for the legitimate interests and sentiments of the other State and the other nation.

"In addition to this, moreover, how many fruitful discussions and successful initiatives have there been, how many treaties negotiated and signed, how many adjustments agreed upon, how many economic, financial, social, administrative, and political agreements have been discussed, negotiated, and put into operation! . . . I think it will not be indiscreet if I say that we both would have wished to achieve, in the course of this long and friendly co-operation, much better results than have actually been shown. In the years 1927-28 the progress in this direction was really exceptionally great, and I am sure that I am expressing your conviction as well as my own if I maintain my optimism and express not only confidence, but certainty that the aim for which we have worked together with devotion for these fourteen years will ultimately be achieved."

The German Minister began his reply by expressing his happiness in having earned the approval of "that critical spirit with which I have so long had the pleasure of collaborating in calm times and turbulent—which has observed me closely with a watchful eye—and which belongs to a man whose views are heard, appreciated and studied in all the countries of the world." Dr Koch continued: "You have called me a man of goodwill. I accept that. I have always been led by the wish and firm intention to improve the relations between our two States, to effect a *rapprochement* between our nations and remove the hindrances which part them. But in politics one man of goodwill can achieve but little. He must have, opposite him, a person dominated by the same feeling and the same desires. If my attempts sometimes had a modest success, I am indebted to you for it, Dr Beneš, and I thank you for it with all my heart. I agree with you that our joint endeavours have not yet been crowned with a success corresponding to our wishes. But I share, too, your hope and your confidence that this aim will one

lay be reached. We are not one of those who think that ideals are given to mortals in order that they may not attain them.

"You have found handsome words for our fourteen years' co-operation. I too shall always think with deep satisfaction of this collaboration, often calm and full of confidence, often, too, somewhat thorny, but always permeated with the sincere wish to achieve understanding and agreement. Our tone together was very open and considerably facilitated the success of our discussions. I thank you in this hour of parting that you were so open to me and allowed me to adopt exactly the same attitude towards you. Happy though I am to return to my beloved fatherland, I leave your beautiful country with deep regret. You know, Dr Beneš, the active interest which I have felt since my youth in your language, your history, your customs, and in everything concerning your nation and your country. That interest will accompany me in my retirement. I wish to say with all sincerity in this last moment that during the fourteen years of my stay in Czechoslovakia both I personally and my family have been shown exemplary hospitality by your countrymen, whatever the political situation may have been. For this, too, I am deeply grateful."

In that June when Dr Koch retired from Prague Mr Baldwin had just succeeded Ramsay MacDonald as Prime Minister and reconstituted his Government. No place was found for Mr Winston Churchill, who would henceforth become the chief critic of that Government, with all the clarity of vision that exclusion of office gives to the mind of a politician.

Mr Baldwin's Government proceeded to shock Europe that June by making a unilateral naval agreement with Germany which broke the Treaty of Versailles as flagrantly as Hitler's conscription order of March 15th. The 'united front' formed by Great Britain, France, and Italy at the Stresa Conference in April on the subject of Germany's repudiation of the Versailles Treaty was shattered already.

It is not even yet realized in Great Britain what harm was done by that naval agreement. Public opinion, which was to be so much shocked by the Hoare-Laval deal, was completely unmoved by that piece of folly, so little upset, indeed, that a muddled electorate five months later gave the Conservative Party a clear majority over all other parties, and by doing so in my opinion condemned itself and the world to suffer the Second World War. In justice to the muddled electorate this was exactly what it believed it was avoiding by returning a "National" Government that would handle Mussolini firmly: it forgot all about Hitler. Or perhaps like Mr Baldwin it had been bespelled by

Hitler's speech in May on Germany's foreign policy, that speech which inspired Mr Baldwin to tear up the peroration he had prepared for his own speech in the debate on the Air Force estimates and to compose another in the mood of a Christmas carol.

Dr Beneš was President of the Assembly of the League of Nations at Geneva that September, and no doubt he rather wished he was not, because the behaviour of Italy towards Abyssinia would have to be dealt with, and Beneš, worried by the hell's broth being compounded in Central Europe, was not in the least anxious to do anything that would lose Italian counsels of moderation to Hungary and Austria, not to mention Poland, which under the baneful influence of Colonel Beck was beginning to make trouble again over Teschen.

However, any apprehensions Dr Beneš may have had were allayed when his old friend Sir Samuel Hoare, now Foreign Secretary, made the most definite statement of the British Government's attitude to the League which had yet been heard. "In conformity with its precise and explicit obligations," Sir Samuel Hoare declared in opening the proceedings, "the League stands, and my country stands with it, for the collective maintenance of the Covenant in its entirety, and particularly for steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression."

Until this astonishingly unequivocal declaration by a British statesman, opinion in Geneva had been inclined to accept the cynical French belief that Great Britain's only interest in the dispute between Italy and Abyssinia was a desire to protect Imperial routes and interests. It was remembered that so recently as 1926 Sir Austen Chamberlain had won Mussolini's support in the dispute between Great Britain and Turkey over Mosul by agreeing to recognize Italy's exclusive right to certain concessions in Abyssinia. It was remembered also that France had perceived in this agreement a plan to effect the economic partition of Abyssinia, and that the Quai d'Orsay, having failed to receive a satisfactory reply from the Foreign Office, had egged on Abyssinia to appeal to the League of Nations for protection against Italian and British acquisitiveness. There was a general inclination among the delegates not to commit themselves to a course of action hostile to Italy unless they were assured of the practical support of Great Britain. After Sir Samuel Hoare's speech there was no longer any hesitation. "In contrast to the embarrassing silence which had sometimes fallen upon the Assembly in recent years, the readiness of other speakers to express their views was refreshing. In general the lead from Great Britain was followed without hesitation. A brief statement by M. Laval

to some extent removed doubts regarding the attitude of France,"¹ which ever since the Flandin Ministry came into power had seemed so determined to effect a Franco-Italian *rapprochement*.

No statesman in Europe was so much encouraged by the Foreign Secretary's speech as Dr Beneš. The humiliations inflicted upon the League over Corfu and Manchuria, the contempt for the League expressed by the withdrawal of Germany and Japan, the scepticism of the United States about the ability of the League to serve a practical pacific purpose—all these could now be rectified, when a Great Power like Great Britain was ready to carry the League beyond the realm of academic debate into the field of action. Dr Beneš demonstrated his belief in the vital importance of what was at stake to the future status of the League by refusing as President to allow the issue to be evaded by any side-tracking manoeuvre of Baron Aloisi, the Italian delegate, who had the support of Austria, Hungary, and Albania.

While discussions at Geneva were in progress Mussolini marched his troops into Abyssinia on October 3rd. Two days later the Council of the League appointed a Committee to examine the situation created by the opening of hostilities. On the following day this Committee of six decided that Italy had committed an act of aggression. On October 7th the Council declared Italy an aggressor, and on October 10th the Assembly of the League invited the member States to form a Committee for co-ordinating sanctions.

Baron Aloisi challenged the right of the Assembly to establish a committee to apply Article 16 of the Covenant on the ground that no competent organ of the League of Nations had yet decided that a case covered by Article 16 had arisen. Aloisi hoped to bring Article 5 into the business because Article 5 declares that "except where otherwise expressly provided in the Covenant . . . decisions at any meeting of the Assembly or of the Council shall require the agreement of all the members of the League represented at the meeting." Aloisi, with the obstructing votes of Austria, Hungary, and Albania, might thus have postponed indefinitely the discussion of sanctions. Dr Beneš, however, could be as subtle as an Italian. He agreed that no organ of the League was competent to decide, in such a way as to bind all the members, that one of them had violated the Covenant. Individual sovereign States must take that decision on their own individual responsibility. Therefore the resolution on which a vote had to be taken did not constitute a formal resolution of the Assembly and the question of an unanimous vote did not arise.

¹ *Annual Register*, 1935.

Naturally in giving this ruling Beneš was supported by the Bureau of the Assembly; but Mussolini never forgave that ruling, and at Munich he had his revenge for it.

Sanctions were imposed on November 18th, but the only effective sanction—an embargo on oil—was left under consideration because Mussolini had made it clear that an embargo on oil would be regarded by him as an act of war, and on December 5th Sir Samuel Hoare, in the debate on the King's speech, which began by reiterating the determination of the Government to fulfil its obligations to the Covenant in co-operation with the other members of the League, told the newly elected House of Commons that the League machinery was working well.

Then, while the question of oil sanctions was still unsettled and on the very next day after this speech, Sir Samuel Hoare on his way to take a holiday in Switzerland called on M. Laval in Paris, with whom he had several conversations about a plan to solve the Abyssinian dispute in a manner satisfactory to Abyssinia, to Italy, and to the League of Nations. On December 9th, the day when the Foreign Secretary left for Switzerland, the Paris Press published versions of the proposed plan which, though they differed in detail, all agreed in asserting that the plan involved large territorial and economic concessions to Italy. Public opinion in Great Britain was shocked, less, it may be feared, on account of the way the League of Nations had been let down than by the prospect of rewarding Mussolini for his truculence.

The Opposition pressed the Government to publish an authoritative statement of what exactly the plan was, but Mr Baldwin said he could not do that until Italy and Abyssinia had expressed an opinion upon the proposals. Mr Eden, in a debate on the adjournment, tried to put the onus on the League by arguing that Sir Samuel Hoare and M. Laval had only been doing what the League wanted in trying to find a basis for peace. If what they were doing was contrary to the principles of the Covenant it was for the League to say so, and if it did the British Government would make no complaint and would accept its judgment. Mr Baldwin seemed less certain than Mr Eden about this. He said that the League of Nations was a very human, fallible body, and the difficulties of keeping it to a continuous policy were almost insuperable. He might have added that the League was not unlike himself. He went on to say that he had never taken the view that if the League should fail they should despair. He might have added that he was only trying to do in the matter of Italy and Abyssinia what he had done in 1923 in the matter of Italy and Greece. He said instead that if the League

ould fail such a failure should merely be regarded as an incentive
to try to do better next time.

Mr Eden returned to Geneva on December 12th and soothed as far
as he was able the feelings of the delegates of some fifty nations who
had all committed themselves to sanctions and were now beginning
to feel a little foolish. On the following day the full text of the proposals
drafted in Paris was published, and it was found that, so far from
exaggerating the benefits for Italy, the premature disclosures in the
press had all erred on the side of understatement. Indignation in Great
Britain was intense, and it was not allayed when it became known
that the Foreign Office had telegraphed to the British Minister in
Addis Ababa, urging him to use his "utmost influence" to induce the
Emperor to give his "careful and favourable consideration" to the
proposals.

It is to be noted that many of the ingredients of Munich in 1938
were tried out on Abyssinia in 1935; but, whereas it could be held that
the British people were frightened of Hitler in 1938, the British people
were certainly not frightened of Mussolini in 1935. However, if the
British people were not frightened of war with Italy the British Govern-
ment apparently was, and, although Sir Samuel Hoare was dropped
overboard when Mussolini turned down the Hoare-Laval proposals,
no attempt was made to impose the oil embargo.

Sir Samuel Hoare, in the speech he made on December 19th after
he had resigned the Foreign Secretaryship, left the House with an im-
pression that throughout the whole business he had played the part
of Adam in that first unfortunate episode in the history of human
morality. Laval had tempted him, and he had swallowed the plan.
He also managed to suggest that the other members of the League
would not have been willing to fight beside Great Britain if Mussolini
had decided to make the oil embargo a *casus belli*. Yet all the nations—
France, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Turkey—invited as early as December
6th to say if they were willing to come to the assistance of Great Britain
in the event of a declaration of war upon her by Italy, had answered
in the affirmative. Nevertheless, by some logically incomprehensible
process of the mind the triumph of Mussolini over Abyssinia was
ultimately charged to the failure of the League of Nations instead of
to the pusillanimity of the British Government. Lord Baldwin is too
easy a target nowadays to waste winged words upon him. It is better
worth recording that on the day after Mussolini started the Abyssinian
War Mr Winston Churchill declared, amid the cheers of the Con-
servative Conference at Bournemouth, that in the Prime Minister we

had a statesman who had gathered to himself a greater volume of confidence and goodwill than any public man he recollected in his long public career. The clarity of vision enjoyed by the politician out of office may have been temporarily distracted by the looming shape of a general election and the possibility of holding office again.

No wonder public opinion remained in a state of confusion.

CHAPTER XVI

ON December 18th, 1935, the day before that speech by Sir Samuel Hoare, Dr Beneš was elected President of the Czechoslovak Republic. That speech was a less auspicious omen than the speech of Sir Samuel Hoare's, which three months earlier had inaugurated Dr Beneš's presidency of the Assembly of the League of Nations.

While Dr Beneš for seventeen years had been directing the foreign policy of the State he had played so large a part in creating, that State itself had been pursuing what compared with most of the other European States can be called an uneventful course. There had been the usual Communist attempt to seize power in 1920, but that had been thwarted without violence, and since 1925, when the Communists polled just over 100,000 votes, their votes had steadily decreased. Four years of Fascist activity from 1925 to 1929 had made much less headway even than in England, and there had not been a trace of anti-Semitism. The general trend was towards a mild Socialism. The great estates, mostly in the hands of German or Magyar gentry (the Coburg and Schönborn family owned three hundred thousand acres of the best land in Bohemia Moravia and Ruthenia) had been broken up. The Land Reform, Act of 1919 had fixed 250 acres of arable and 250 acres of forest or pasture land as the maximum holding. Compensation to German owners had been paid at the 1913-15 level, and they had been paid in a stable currency. By the time Dr Beneš became President some four and a half million acres of land had been redistributed among 150,000 applicants. There was an eight-hour day, sickness and unemployment insurance, Government aid for housing, pensions for old soldiers and their dependents, a good system of wage arbitration courts, and protection of the tenant. The co-operative movement had made enormous strides under the Republic, and there were about 17,000 co-operative enterprises of one kind or another.

The backward condition of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia on account of the deliberate Magyar policy was still a problem and offered a great obstacle to any feasible scheme of autonomy. In 1915 there were 4000 elementary schools in Slovakia and Ruthenia, of which only about 300 served the Slovaks, who constituted over two-thirds of the population. Illiteracy among the Slovaks over six years old stood at 28.6 per cent. and among the Ruthenians at 57.6 per cent. In

Bohemia at that date the illiteracy was only 2.12 per cent. Within less than twenty years of the emergence of the Czechoslovak Republic illiteracy had been reduced to a third of the 1915 figure. In 1915 there were no commercial or secondary schools for Slovaks and Ruthenes. Twenty years later there were sixty-nine secondary and one university. Yet the Magyar minority did not suffer on account of the redistribution. Over 94 per cent. of the Hungarian schoolchildren were taught by Magyar teachers in their own tongue, such teachers being paid at the same rates as Czech and Slovak teachers.

As for the German minority there were more German schools per pupil than Czechoslovak, and the Government spent more money per German pupil than it did on Czech and Slovak children. More money was spent per head on the students in the German University at Prague than on Czech and Slovak students.

It should be borne in mind that it was not until after Locarno that in 1926 the German minority agreed to join the Government, when two of their deputies were at once given portfolios.

When Dr Beneš became President he was determined to apply to internal affairs those powers of accommodation which had made him by far the most conspicuously successful Foreign Minister in Europe; but it was soon obvious that so far as the German minority was concerned nothing he said or did and nothing that his Government said or did was likely to affect the situation for better or worse. The future of Czechoslovakia would be at the mercy of the old *furor Teutonicus* if protection against that *furor* had not been secured by the pledged word of France and Russia to come to her aid.

No doubt Dr Beneš hoped that Laval would soon quit the helm of the Third Republic. The Abyssinian business had been an unpleasant revelation of Laval's corrupting influence. It was clear that Hitler was convinced by the attitude of France and Great Britain at Geneva that both countries would do almost anything to avoid war; and when in March 1936 Hitler denounced the Locarno Pact and marched troops into the demilitarized Rhineland Dr Beneš could hardly have been impressed by Mr Baldwin's reply, which was to make Sir Thomas Inskip Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence. In justice to Mr Baldwin it must be admitted that a majority of the people of Great Britain were relieved that Mr Winston Churchill on account of his anti-German attitude was not called upon for the job. They were angry with Mussolini, but on the whole public opinion "was ready to condone Germany's breach of her treaty obligations."¹ France and

¹ *Annual Register*, 1936.

Belgium wanted to impose financial and economic sanctions, but the British Government would have nothing to do with so provocative a step. Even the proposed staff talks were denounced by Lloyd George, "showing not for the first time his pro-German sympathies."¹

In May the three Foreign Ministers of the Little Entente met in Belgrade and sent a telegram to President Beneš to assure him that the policy of the Little Entente would continue to be carried out in his spirit. But Yugoslavia had accepted the German reoccupation of the Rhineland with an equanimity which Czechoslovak opinion found disquieting. Rumanian policy, with Titulescu still in charge of foreign affairs, was pro-French and anti-German with a slight leaning towards Russia. This inclination caused trouble in the Cabinet, and in August Titulescu resigned to be replaced by Antonescu, which produced a sudden tilt towards Germany and Italy. In spite of the efforts of Colonel Beck relations between Germany and Poland worsened perceptibly owing to the outrageous attempts to Germanize the Polish minority in Germany, disruptive activity by the Nazis in Silesia, and their truculent behaviour in Danzig towards the Poles. Unfortunately, instead of working with the Little Entente, the deplorable Beck tried to intrigue in Belgrade against Bucharest and Prague. In June President Beneš and Prince Paul of Yugoslavia went to Bucharest to confer with King Carol. Yet in spite of solemn affirmations about the solidarity of the Little Entente, cracks were already visible. Czechoslovakia was now the prime object of Goebbels's propaganda hose, and if Germany should decide upon an attack neither Yugoslavia nor Rumania was bound to come to her aid. That was the fundamental weakness of the Little Entente.

Beneš himself continued to profess optimism. On August 19th in reply to the accusations of Germany he made a speech at Reichenberg in which he appealed for interior political and economic collaboration between the Germans and the Czechoslovaks and an end to the exaggeration of racial differences between two races who were too mature to be denationalized.

"The question of our national policy and also of our Germans," he said, "has recently become a topic of interest both inside and outside our country. Let us say at the outset that the reasons for this are to be sought in the chaotic conditions prevailing in the international sphere, in the high tension that pervades national sentiment in Germany and in a certain 'radicalization' of the racial minorities not merely with us but in all countries. . . . Nationality questions are an internal concern

¹ *Annual Register*, 1936.

for all countries without exception. Czechoslovakia adheres to this principle unconditionally. . . . No European State has a right to meddle in those questions and Czechoslovakia, as a sovereign State . . . will in no circumstances tolerate such intervention. The sole external influence which our State allows in these matters is the supervision exercised by the League of Nations. . . . We cannot discuss our nationality questions with anybody else. . . .

"The relationship of the two races must depend exclusively on mutual agreement and co-operation, upon direct, open and loyal discussions without pressure, without threats, without nervousness and 'radicalism,'¹ without harsh words and exaggerations and without any tendentious or untrue presentation of the facts. . . . This work can only be successful if you follow in the footsteps of those classic figures of the German spirit which are great and classical for the Czechs too—in the footsteps of Herder, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, and their like—if we all do what we can to come close together in our ideal concept of the world and if neither the one nor the other of us allows himself to be bewildered by the chaos of ideas of post-war Europe, by temporary ideologies which separate peoples instead of drawing them together, and which ere long will be ousted by the genuine ideals of humanity and a sensible Europeanism. . . .

"The Czechoslovak Constitution provides a common meeting-ground for us all. Our Constitution is of so liberal a character that it suffices to meet all these problems. Our political philosophy and morality take the form of democracy, a democracy that provides us with a solution of all our problems since it postulates in all political negotiations a respect for the human personality and assures complete civil equality, irrespective of difference of class, nationality, or religion."

President Beneš was entitled to acclaim Czechoslovak democracy. No other State in Europe could display a comparable egalitarianism in practice. When he called it "a country of the happy mean," he uttered a simple truth. And in his anxiety as always to be scrupulously fair he admitted that, notwithstanding the remarkable record of the Czechoslovak Republic during the seventeen years of its existence, there had been "shortcomings and a debit side." If he did not stress these shortcomings it was because he could not do so without seeming to criticize an internal administration, for which, except during the few months when he was Prime Minister in 1921-22, he had no responsibility. Indeed, it was his continuous preoccupation with foreign affairs which caused the bitterness some of the politicians at home felt against

¹ Radical is used in the sense of extremist.

him. It had always been his compromise abroad which had involved him in unpopularity. Mr Harold Nicolson was convinced that Kramář was always behind everything 'nasty' that Beneš did at the Peace Conference, and 'nastiness' there meant insisting upon some territorial addition at the expense of the principle of nationality. However, it really is not worth while wasting time in arguing about the rights and wrongs of the German minority in Czechoslovakia. If the whole three million of them had been maintained in opulence at the expense of the State Hitler would have found an excuse to attack Czechoslovakia because that country stood directly in the path of the expansion he had proclaimed necessary for Germany in *Mein Kampf*. Bismarck disposed of Austria before he precipitated the war with France. Who holds Bohemia, he said, is the strategic master of Europe. Let it be admitted that the Sudeten Germans had a few small grievances after barely twenty years of a new State's existence. Those grievances were less than the grievances any Scottish or Welsh Nationalist feels he can complain of and far less than the grievances of Irish Nationalists a century after the compulsory Union inflicted upon Ireland. The chief grievance of the Germans was that the competent Czech bureaucrats held most of the good jobs. This was noticeable in Slovakia too, where owing to the repressive and obscurantist system of the Magyars there were not enough Slovaks at first who had the necessary experience or even education for a more enlightened administration. Consequently Czechs had had to fill most of the jobs, and they were disinclined to relinquish them.

That Hitler would willingly have seized half Europe without war if he could is no doubt true: no burglar uses firearms if he can get the swag without them. Beneš decided to warn him that he would not be allowed to burgle Czechoslovakia as Mussolini had burgled Abyssinia.

"I do not deny for all time the possibility of conflicts," he said that day at Reichenberg, "but in the first place they are neither inevitable nor necessary, nor present nor near; and secondly both we and our friends are prepared so to defend the State to the last breath that such a conflict would hardly bring any benefit to an aggressor. For that reason conflicts can be avoided. I am to-day convinced that the Locarno Powers will come to some agreement this autumn with collaboration in Europe and that good-neighbourly relations on a treaty basis will be achieved between Germany and ourselves."

"Our friends" were France and Russia, and German propaganda became virulent. The Spanish Civil War had begun. It was necessary

for the German and Italian policy of intervention on behalf of General Franco to present Bolshevism as an active menace to European peace. Czechoslovakia was accused of serving as an advanced base for Russian aggression and specifically of providing the Soviet forces with aerodromes. Such charges were easy to rebut, but it was less easy to counter the propaganda that Czechoslovakia was a hotbed of crypto-communism because this was disseminated more subtly and enjoyed such success that when the time was ripe for Hitler to strike numbers of people in Great Britain supposed that Czechoslovakia really was a Communist salient.

By the constitution of the Republic, which was influenced by Masaryk's admiration for the Constitutions of the Anglo-Saxon nations, the President as in the United States is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, and Dr Beneš lost no time in looking to the defences of his country. It may be remembered that back in 1917 he had devoted himself to an intensive and extensive study of military theory in order to equip himself for discussion with the Ministry for War about the Czechoslovak troops in France. He worked even harder now, and to such purpose that by the time Hitler did strike in September 1938 Czechoslovakia was defended by an improvement on the Maginot Line, by forty first-class divisions and by nearly 1500 first-line aeroplanes. The great Skoda munition factory and many other factories had been working at full blast for two and a half years. The verdict of Europe was unanimous that the Czechoslovak Army was the best equipped of its size in the world. Moreover, none of the money spent on defence was wasted. Millions were poured away on rearmament in France and Britain for which the taxpayers of the two countries saw no results. Hitler watched the Czechoslovak rearmament with gathering rage, and some of his pathological hatred of Beneš was the expression of those months of nervous anxiety which the rearmament of Czechoslovakia cost him before Munich.

In the early part of 1936 there seemed good hope that Austria and Czechoslovakia would draw closer together. The Vatican, which was growing nervous of the evident inability of the German Catholics to stand up to Nazi persecution, had for some time been considering the idea of Czechoslovakia's becoming a guarantor of Austria's political Catholicism. It was with this in view that Dr Beneš received the support of the Catholics in the Presidential election. Incidentally, it should be noted that when the Nazis murdered Dr Dollfuss in 1934 they found on his desk a proposal from Beneš for a Treaty of Friendship, Arbitration, and Common Defence against any aggressor.

Now in 1936 all seemed in trim for a *rapprochement* which was much desired by the Czechoslovak Government to counteract Nazi influence among their German minority; but Dr Schuschnigg went to Budapest on March 13th and succumbed again to Italian pressure, with the result that ten days later he signed a Three-Power Pact in Rome with Italy and Hungary, one of the provisions of which was that none of the signatories was to negotiate on Danubian questions with any fourth State unless the other two signatories had been previously consulted. That was the end of Austria, for the proclamation of Mussolini at Milan of the Berlin-Rome Axis, somewhat unsuitably on All Saints' Day, meant that the clerico-Fascist regime of Vienna would last only so long as Hitler's plans tolerated its survival.

On October 11th, 1936, Count Trautmannsdorf and Dr Haushofer, a son of General Haushofer, the geo-politician whose theories of pan-Germanism had exercised a strong influence on Hitler's blood-worship, came to Prague with a proposal that Germany and Czechoslovakia should sign a Non-Aggression Pact similar to that between Germany and Poland signed in January 1934. Dr Beneš gave these two confidential emissaries of Hitler a three hours' audience at the Castle and ascertained that the proposed pact was to be an agreement between Hitler and himself carried through in complete secrecy and not notified to other Governments until everything was completed. That had been the method adopted for the Hitler-Pilsudski Pact negotiated by Colonel Beck.

Dr Beneš asked for time to consider the proposal, and the two emissaries returned to Prague on December 18th, 1936, where they had a seven hours' audience. Dr Beneš asked how this proposed pact would affect the Treaties of Mutual Aid with France and Soviet Russia and how Czechoslovak obligations to other States and the League of Nations would be affected. Was Czechoslovakia expected to renounce all her defensive treaties and follow Germany out of the League of Nations? The emissaries replied that Czechoslovakia need not renounce any treaties or leave Geneva, but that if a dispute or conflict arose between Germany and France or between Germany and Soviet Russia or between Germany and the League of Nations, Czechoslovakia would simply fail to fulfil her obligations. It was so simple. Dr Beneš at once enquired whether Germany considered herself bound by the German-Czechoslovak Arbitration Treaty of Locarno, and when the emissaries answered in the affirmative he said he would draft an agreement based on the Locarno Treaty but that Czechoslovakia would have to honour all her obligations. The emissaries returned to Berlin, and during the

Christmas holidays Beneš drafted a Pact of Non-Aggression based on the Locarno Agreements and transmitted it to Haushofer and Trautmannsdorf through the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin. The latter waited for an acknowledgment, but he heard nothing until on January 12th, 1937, Count Trautmannsdorf called on him to explain that he and Dr Haushofer had given Hitler a written report of their conversations with President Beneš with which he had expressed his satisfaction and to which he hoped soon to give a definite reply. He could not answer immediately on account of some extremely important negotiations which were then in progress and the result of which might affect the reply to President Beneš. Whether deliberately or by an indiscretion Count Trautmannsdorf let out that these negotiations were with Moscow. Dr Beneš's curiosity was roused by this news, and after reflection he decided to ask the Soviet Minister in Prague to come and see him.

Beneš sounded the Russian diplomat cautiously for some time, but he was unable to extract any information from him. Then he said that he was fully aware of the negotiations now proceeding between the Russians and the Germans, and asked the Soviet Minister whether he thought it was agreeable to hear of such an underhand business after the Pact of Mutual Aid signed and ratified in June 1935. Beneš perceived that the Soviet Minister's amazement was unfeigned and that his denial of any knowledge of such negotiations was obviously the truth. Suddenly his manner became apprehensive, and he tried to obtain more positive information from Dr Beneš, who merely reiterated his absolute certainty that such negotiations were in progress.

"And I assume that they are being conducted by your Government," he told the Minister, who retired in obvious alarm and perplexity, no doubt to telegraph the news of this interview to Litvinov.

In that January the second of the great Moscow trials was held, which ended in thirteen of the accused being shot. Nevertheless, the negotiations still went on. On May 31st the Chief Political Officer of the Red Army committed suicide to avoid arrest. Between June 1st and 4th a supreme military court composed of Marshals Voroshilov, Yegorov, Buděnný, and Blücher sentenced to death Marshal Tukhachevsky and seven other generals on charges of treason and of spying "on behalf of an unfriendly State." The eight men were found guilty, and on June 12th they were shot.

"It is almost impossible to believe," said the *Annual Register* for 1937, voicing the general opinion of Western Europe, "that these officers were really guilty of high treason and of espionage in the service of Foreign Powers."

Dr Beneš, who had at once grasped the situation of the whole Trautmannsdorf story, did not find it at all a strain upon his belief. With the wisdom that comes from seven years' experience of Hitler since 1937 we no longer find it a strain upon our belief.

Whether the Tukhachevsky affair was linked up with Trotsky's scheme or whether it was an independent militarist plot is not perfectly clear. Trotsky believed that if the Western Powers could be involved in a war with one another from which Russia stood aside the World Revolution was attainable. Stalin believed that the creation of an invincible, prosperous, and exemplary Federation of Socialist States was more useful than a World Revolution. That Hitler was willing to negotiate with dissident Russian elements in the winter of 1936-37 may have been the inspiration of Stalin's deal in August 1939, when, despairing of Great Britain and France, he tried to gain time for Russia to build up her defences. It was taking a fearful risk, but it was appeasement carried to its logical conclusion, and morally it did not deserve a graver censure than the behaviour of the British and French statesmen who bought time in 1938 for the defence of their own countries by consenting to the mutilation of a small State.

It is worth noting that in the early months of 1937 Hitler's speeches were less violent against Bolshevism, but that after the military purge they became more furious than ever. Anyway, no more emissaries came to Prague with offers of non-aggression pacts. Hitler's next approach was through an intimate friend of Konrad Henlein, the Führer of the Sudeten Nazis, and that was an invitation for Dr Beneš to visit Hitler personally. The response of Beneš to those approaches has already been related.

In the summer of 1937, after coming back from one of his too frequent visits to Germany, Henlein tried to associate the other minorities in Czechoslovakia with the Sudeten German agitation, though obviously if the Germans were to obtain concessions the other minorities could not be excluded from them. Therefore such an intrigue was ominous: it suggested that Hitler was preparing for a complete break up of the Republic that stood in the way of his schemes.

"Dr Beneš," said the Sudeten Deputy, Karl Hermann Frank, "imagines that he can solve the nationality question in so pacifying a manner that the solution, once arrived at, may form, as he likes to say, 'bridges of understanding' with Poland and Hungary. But the Poles in the Teschen area belong to Poland, the Hungarians in Slovakia and Carpathian Russia (Ruthenia) to Hungary, just as we Sudeten Germans belong to the Third Reich. . . . Base your tactics on that.

Above all, discretion. But be at all times prepared to march. When it is necessary for you to come into the open, the Warsaw and Budapest Governments will let you know.”¹

If decent opinion had any lingering doubts about the sanity of the creature to whom the German nation had entrusted its destiny they vanished after that visit which Dr Schuschnigg, the Austrian Chancellor, paid to Berchtesgaden on February 12th of the disastrous year 1938, “to clear up misunderstanding” caused by the discovery of Rudolf Hess’s conspiracy to destroy Austria, which in its details curiously resembled the plan by which the destruction of Czechoslovakia was later on achieved. There was to be terrorist action by the local Nazis, diplomatic action to secure the passivity of Great Britain and France, a declaration by Hitler that he could not look on and see German blood shed when the Austrian police had been provoked into clashes with the terrorists, and finally an invasion and annexation of Austria. Hitler foamed and raved, abusing Schuschnigg as a “dwarf” and a “murderer” and finally, after proclaiming himself to be the greatest German that was ever born and demanding how a nonentity like Schuschnigg dared to open his mouth to argue with so great a man, he gave the Austrian Chancellor his ultimatum. Exactly a month later Austria was overrun at the moment when there was a ministerial crisis in France after the resignation of the Chautemps Cabinet and before the short-lived Blum Cabinet took office. Nevertheless, the French made an effort to secure a *démarche* in association with Great Britain and Italy. Italy refused point-blank, and Mr Neville Chamberlain, speaking in the House of Commons on March 14th, conveyed the impression that he regarded “as chimerical any idea of going to the rescue of the sufferer.”

During the debate that followed Mr Churchill urged the Government to give some pledge for the maintenance of the independence of Czechoslovakia. Mr Butler, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, said that “the obligations of the Government to Czechoslovakia—as to Austria—were those which every member of the League of Nations assumed towards its fellow-members, and apart from that no special guarantee had been given.” In the House of Lords two days later, where “the Anschluss . . . received a blessing from the Archbishop of Canterbury,” Lord Halifax informed his listeners that “solemn assurances had been given to the Government of Czechoslovakia by the German Government, and by those the British Government

¹ Quoted by Eugene Lenhoff in his *In Defence of Dr Beneš and Czech Democracy* (Rich and Cowan), p. 60.

expected the German Government to abide." On the same day Mr Chamberlain, replying to questions in the House of Commons, supported himself against the League of Nations, the stability of which he and his half-brother Austen had done more than any other pair of human beings to shake. Indeed, only a week or two before he had insisted to the House that "they ought not to delude small, weak nations into thinking that they would be protected by the League of Nations against aggression." Mr Chamberlain held out no prospect that the Government would undertake further commitments. He was, in fact, already under the fatal fascination which Hitler has exercised over elderly men of affairs. Then on March 21st Mr A. T. Lennox-Boyd, the new Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and one of the most obsequious of the Chamberlain pages-in-waiting, declared on a public platform that "Britain should not interest herself in Czechoslovakia." Although this was exactly what Mr Chamberlain himself thought, he was compelled under strong criticism to dissociate the Government from the indiscretion which it was felt might have too discouraging an effect in France. On March 24th he told the House that in view of recent events in Austria the question had arisen whether Britain should not give an assurance to France that if German aggression against Czechoslovakia compelled her to implement her obligations under the Treaty of Mutual Aid the full military force of Britain would be employed on her behalf. Or, alternatively, should Britain at once declare she would take military action to resist any forcible interference with the independence and integrity of Czechoslovakia and invite other nations to associate themselves with Britain in such a declaration? The British Prime Minister emphatically rejected both proposals which would involve "automatic commitments in relation to an area where British interests were not vitally concerned. This did not mean, however, that in all circumstances Britain would keep aloof. If war broke out, the inexorable pressure of facts might well prove more powerful than formal pronouncements, and even without having assumed legal obligations, Britain might well find herself beside a country to which she was bound by such ties of friendship and interest as France."

Neville Chamberlain's mind was a Maginot Line of provincial inexperience and parochial prejudice invulnerable to the weightiest argument that reason or imagination could bring to bear against it. It would have been useless to quote to him from an article by Henri de Kerillis in the *Epoque*:

"Bohemia and Slovakia are a bastion, a great junction that commands all the roads of Europe. With Czechoslovakia under her rule

Germany will be able to encircle Poland and Hungary, and gain an outlet to the reserves of oil and wheat in Rumania and Russia. If Hitler takes Prague, he will, in fact, have become master of Europe.”¹

Nevertheless, although he was convinced that British interests were not vitally concerned, Mr Chamberlain did have a dim notion that somehow Britain might be involved unless he could persuade France to dishonour her bond in the interest of peace for Western Europe; therefore he could not commit his country to a rejection of action in any circumstances.

Dr Beneš did not know Neville Chamberlain, but he knew other British statesmen, and he was aware of the immense dislike any modern British statesman has of making an unequivocal statement which commits himself or his country to anything. So unused, indeed, are the British people to directness of speech from a politician of any party that when Mr Churchill told them in 1940 just what they would have to endure to get out of the worst jam they had ever been in they thought he had a larger vocabulary than anybody else because for the first time they heard a Prime Minister utter winged words instead of moulted phrases. Dr Beneš, aware of the British horror of commitments, was much more encouraged by Chamberlain's speech than he ought to have been.

France and Russia had given categorical assurances that their pacts would be honoured, and now Britain had gone as far as Britain could ever bring herself to go in making a statement about her intentions.

On April 16th, the day after Mussolini's Good Friday rape of Albania, Dr Beneš made a speech in harmony with the hallowed Eastertide, when Czechs for three days lay aside all disputes.

“I believe in the possibility of understanding between us and Germany,” he declared. “We decline to join any kind of ideological pact and, just as emphatically, we decline to be included in any pacts of this kind by anyone. But also we believe that peace can only be preserved if different regimes fully respect one another, and if no State directly or indirectly intervenes in the affairs of another State. I believe that the forces for peace in all the countries of Europe are much stronger than they appear to be. That is why even now I do not believe that war is unavoidable. It is our holy duty to be ready for it, but at the same time to do our best to strengthen the common endeavour that such a conflict should not arise.”

Beneš then announced that he and the Czechoslovak Government intended to reach a final solution of the national problems, and to

¹Quoted by Alexander Werth in *France and Munich* (H. Hamilton, 1939), p. 120.

"contribute this . . . for the sake of European peace and European collaboration. Our common fatherland will not only solve its national problems justly, by an unwavering adherence to democratic and purely European ideals, but it will thus also contribute towards the bringing about of a genuine moral, social and political European peace. Therefore it is my wish that all pending nationality questions, particularly those between the Czechs and the Germans, should be discussed objectively, and that a formula of agreement and compromise acceptable to both parties should be found in a friendly way. This matter must be tackled by both sides in a spirit of goodwill, mutual esteem, and equality, but first and foremost in the spirit of frankness and fair play. The Czechoslovaks and the Germans in Czechoslovakia have a duty to give a good example to the whole of Europe of how national difficulties can be solved in the interests of an ancient, centuries-old, common fatherland."

In order to show that he meant what he said President Beneš thereupon proclaimed a far-reaching amnesty under which Sudeten Germans who had been found guilty of high treason were summarily released. He might as well have offered an apple-dumpling to a man-eating tiger. The Henleinist Press threw the amnesty back in his face as a worthless gesture of conciliation.

It is easy now to criticize Dr Beneš for trying to pretend that lunatics were national creatures, that embittered egomaniacs were men of goodwill, that Germans, in fact, were civilized human beings; but his whole life's work had been built up on a profound belief in the power of reason, and to him the very existence of that Czechoslovak Republic, of which he was now the President, was a living witness to the power of reason. He could not bring himself to believe that European statesmanship would continue much longer to allow that Bedlamite star-gazer to destroy liberty, order, decency, and law. Yet what was happening in Austria without interference by the two great Western democracies should have forbidden the faintest optimism about the future.

Eugene Lennhoff quotes¹ letters from a high official in the Prague Ministry of Foreign Affairs which show that there was some apprehension about that optimism:

"In his Easter message the President has asked for honesty and fair play from Henlein during the forthcoming discussions about the minority problems. I believe that Dr Beneš is still judging Henlein and his people incorrectly. This amnesty has given freedom to many of them who were punished for preparing attacks against the Republic. . . .

¹ *In Defence of Dr Beneš and Czech Democracy.*

Even if Czechoslovakia is to become a second Switzerland, Henlein will know how to sabotage it. Dr Beneš and Dr Hodža (the Prime Minister) still believe in the goodwill of the Henleinists . . . our statesmen . . . believe that the number of Sudeten German irredentists is really very small. . . . Our optimists . . . are going blindly through political life, otherwise they would have to see that Henlein is nothing but a puppet, whose movements are directed by Hitler. And Hitler wants an operation. He wants to amputate the Sudeten German territory, without bloodshed, but by blackmail, as in Austria. Henlein himself has been remarkably quiet these last days. I am sure that the next time he speaks my people will wake up to a dreadful reality."

Four days after this letter was written Henlein made the speech at Karlsbad in which he laid down the eight points as the minimum that would pacify his followers:

1. Full national and political equality of status for Czechs and Germans.
2. This equality to be guaranteed by a recognition of the Sudeten Germans as a legal national entity within the Czechoslovak Republic.
3. The determination and recognition of German areas within the State.
4. Full self-government for these areas.
5. Legal protection of this special status for every Sudeten German citizen living outside the area of his own nationality.
6. Removal of injustices inflicted on the Sudeten Germans since 1918 and reparation for the damage caused.
7. Recognition and realization of the principle "German regions—German officials."
8. Full liberty to profess German nationality and the German National Socialist political philosophy.

And outside this official programme Henlein demanded that Czechoslovak foreign policy should abandon the alliances with France and Russia and subordinate itself to Germany.

The programme was rejected next day in a semi-official Press statement in which the Government declared that it would continue with its own plans for the satisfaction of justifiable minority claims, unaffected by the extravagant demands made at Karlsbad.

"In Prague they were depressed," wrote that official at the Foreign Ministry. "Part of Henlein's demands could be conceded, part should

already have been given voluntarily, but to the rest of them there is only one answer—they are unacceptable. . . . Who can expect us to deliver up the Czech minorities, the German democrats, and our Jewish citizens, to a National Socialist regime? . . . Czech statesmen, and the people too, are beginning to wonder if these demands that Henlein has put forward are his maximum, or only his minimum demands. . . . There can be no doubt whatsoever that Henlein's demands originated either in the capital of the Reich or in Berchtesgaden. The Wilhelmstrasse says that Henlein could not possibly make the slightest compromise. It is my impression that these gentlemen in Berlin sincerely hope the Prague Government will say that one or the other of Henlein's points is impossible. From a refusal . . . it would be simple to build up some pretext for intervention. . . . But Dr Beneš will not be frightened by any threat or ultimatum. He will hold discussions with the minority leaders, and he himself is perfectly willing to go a long way to meet the Sudeten Germans. But it is quite impossible that he should accept any of Henlein's demands which entail an attack against the democracy, the sovereignty, the freedom, and the integrity of the Czechoslovak State. Such a thing would be against his principles and would be in direct opposition to the political programme for which he has worked so actively and energetically all his life."

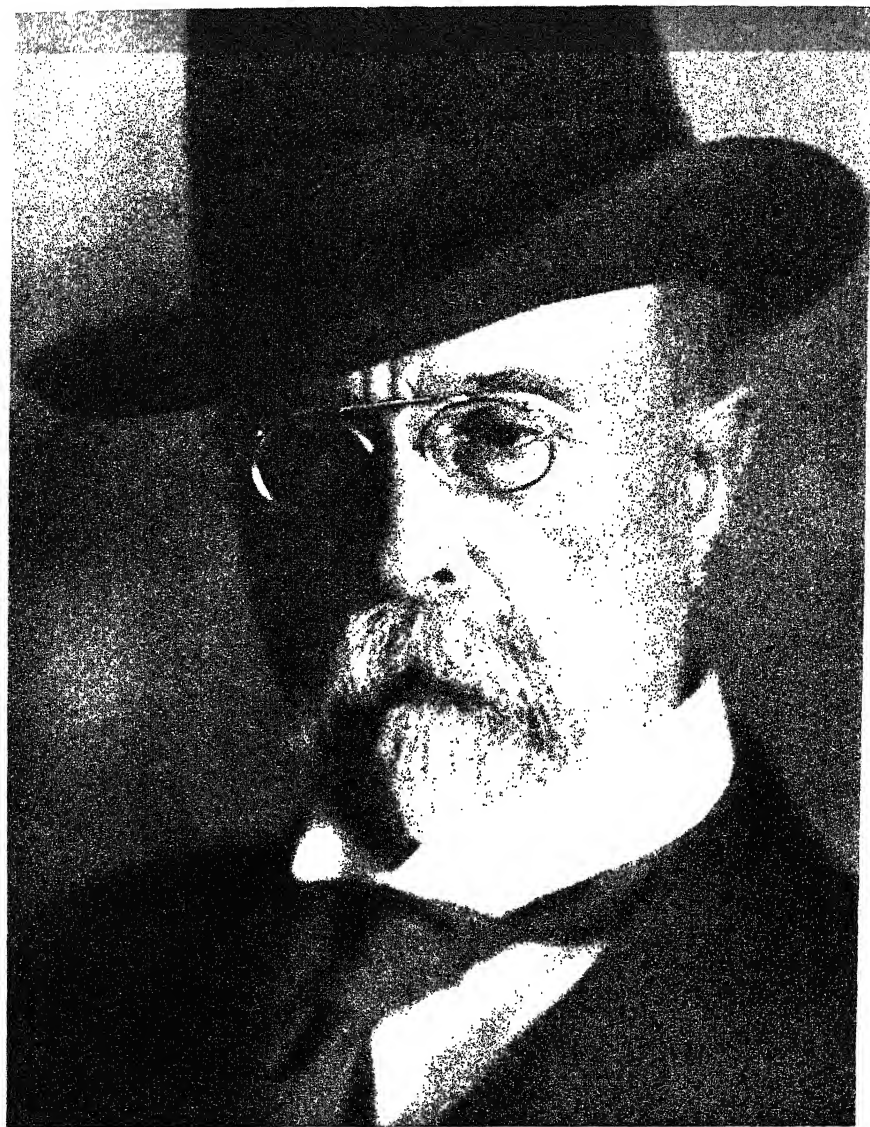
As we have heard, Dr Beneš refused absolutely to visit Hitler and make an arrangement with him directly. He had noted what happened to Schuschnigg. Apart from that it was not in him to go back on his word. Even if he had suspected that France intended to betray him he would not have considered anticipating such a betrayal by treachery of his own.

At the end of that April M. Daladier, who had succeeded M. Blum as Prime Minister, crossed the Channel with M. Bonnet, his Foreign Minister, to have a discussion with Mr Chamberlain and Lord Halifax. The result of these talks was that the French statesmen agreed to help the British statesmen to secure recognition of Italy's conquest of Abyssinia from the League of Nations and to follow the British policy of non-intervention in Spain, while the British statesmen on their side promised to support the French statesmen over Czechoslovakia—with some eagerness when it became evident to them that the French statesmen were in favour of bringing moral pressure to bear on Czechoslovakia to surrender to the Sudeten Germans. That meeting in London was a blueprint of the Munich dovecot.

The President of Czechoslovakia poured his little drop of oil on the stormy international sea by sending a telegram to Hitler on May Day,

when Czechs and Germans were demonstrating, the former on behalf of "the unity of the nation, the defence of the Republic, democracy and peace," the latter on behalf of National Socialism.

"On the occasion of the German national holiday," Dr Beneš wired, "I express to your Excellency my most sincere good wishes."



PRESIDENT T. G. MASARYK

A great scholar, statesman, and European. Spiritual and political leader of the nation.
Founder and President of the first Czechoslovak Republic.



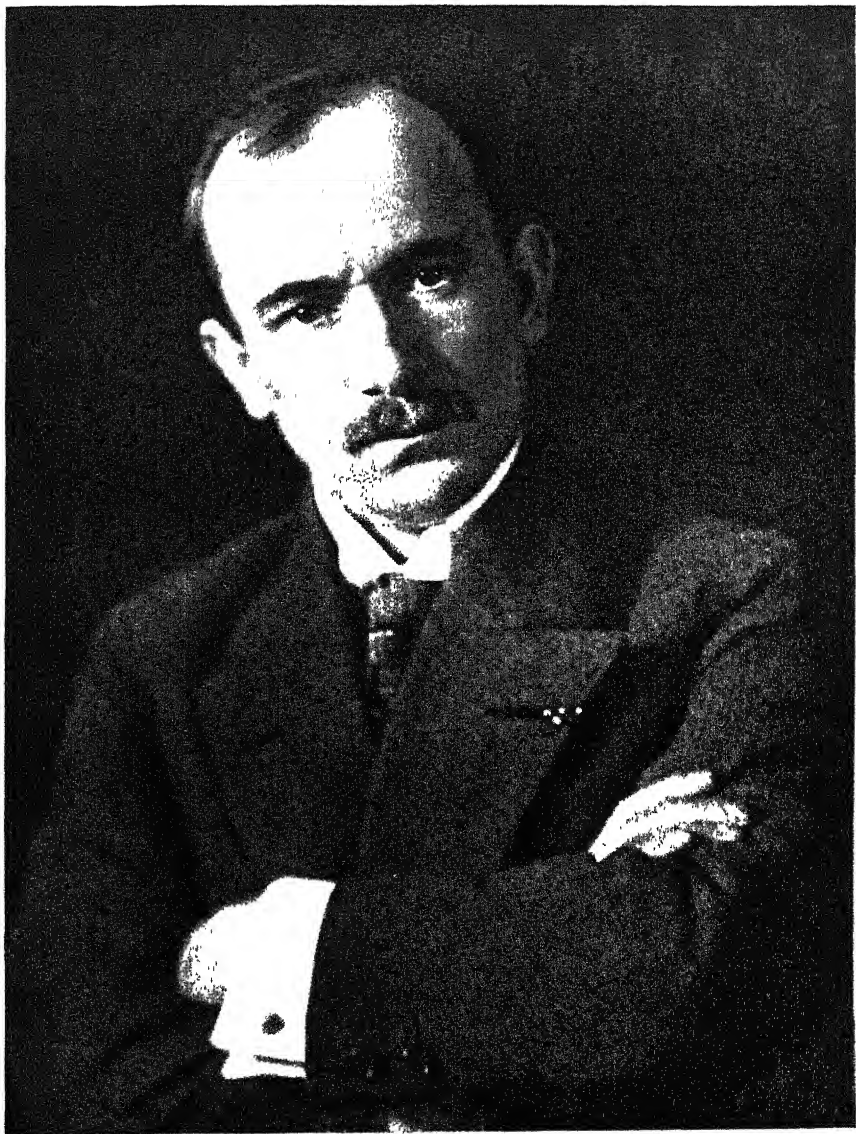
GENERAL M. R. ŠTEFÁNIK

The Slovak member of the triumvirate heading Czechoslovakia's first liberation movement during the World War of 1914-18.

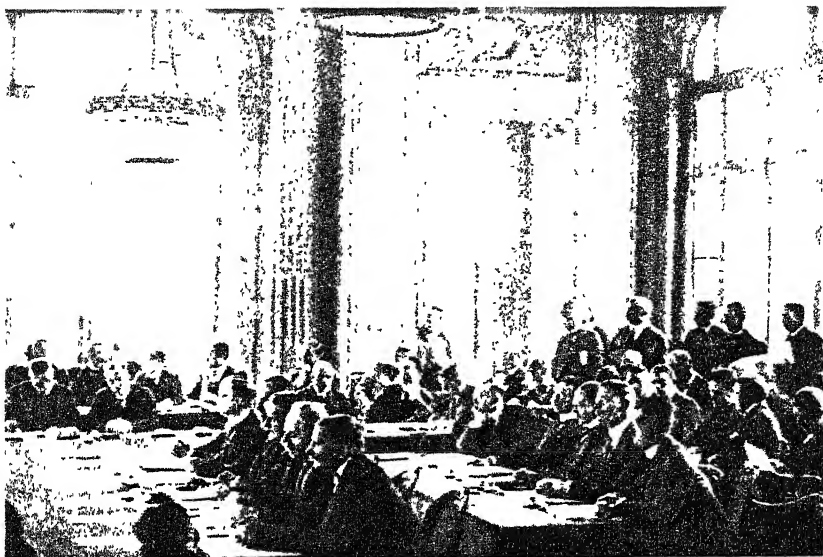


DR E. BENEŠ, 1914

In his flat in Prague. He had joined T. G. Masaryk in his campaign for the liberation of Czechoslovakia.

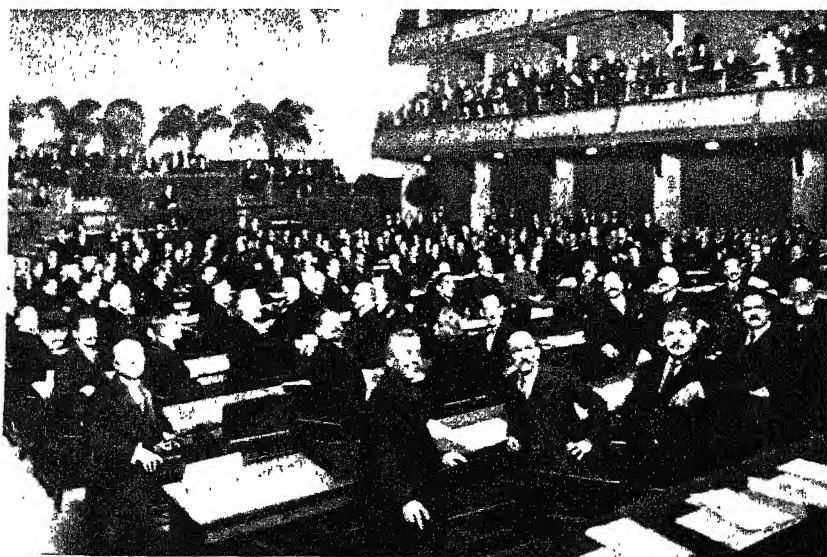


DR. E. BENEŠ
He is Foreign Minister at the age of 34.



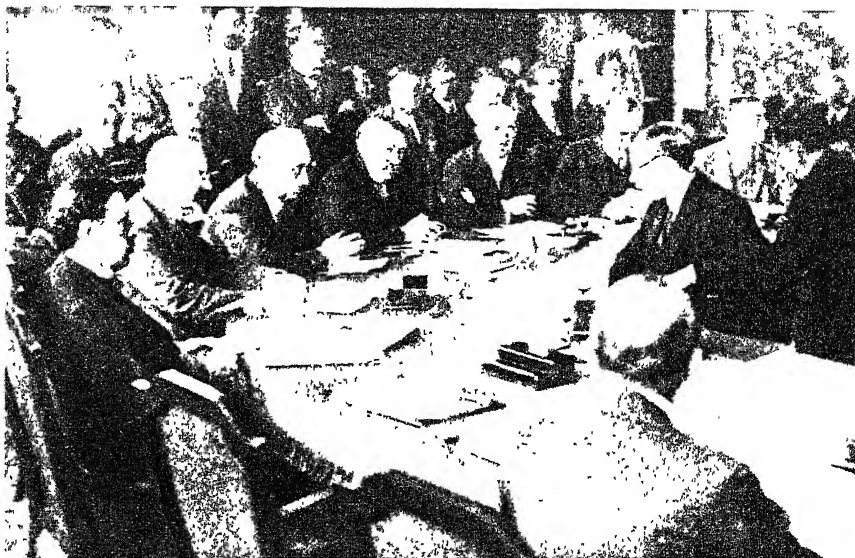
VERSAILLES, 1919

The Czechoslovak delegation, led by Dr Beneš and Dr Kramář, at the Peace Conference.

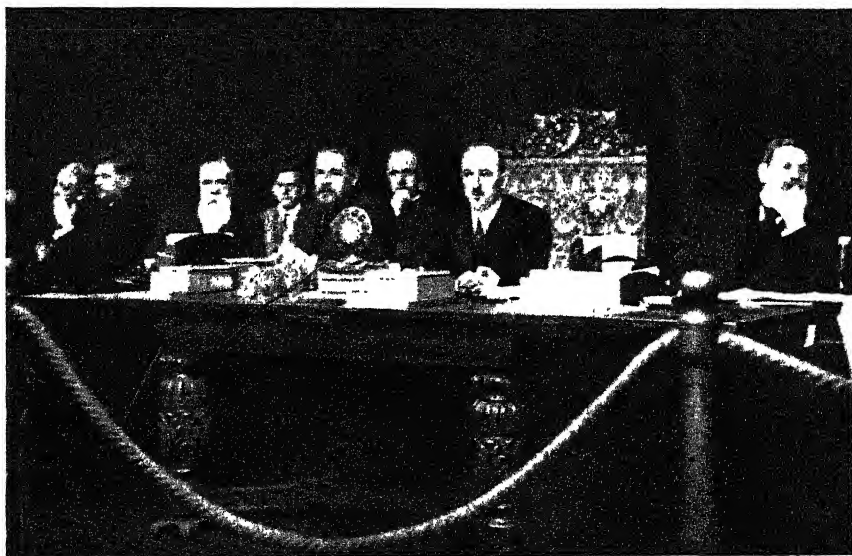


GENEVA, 1920

First General Assembly of the League of Nations.



GENEVA, 1926
Seventh General Assembly of the League of Nations.

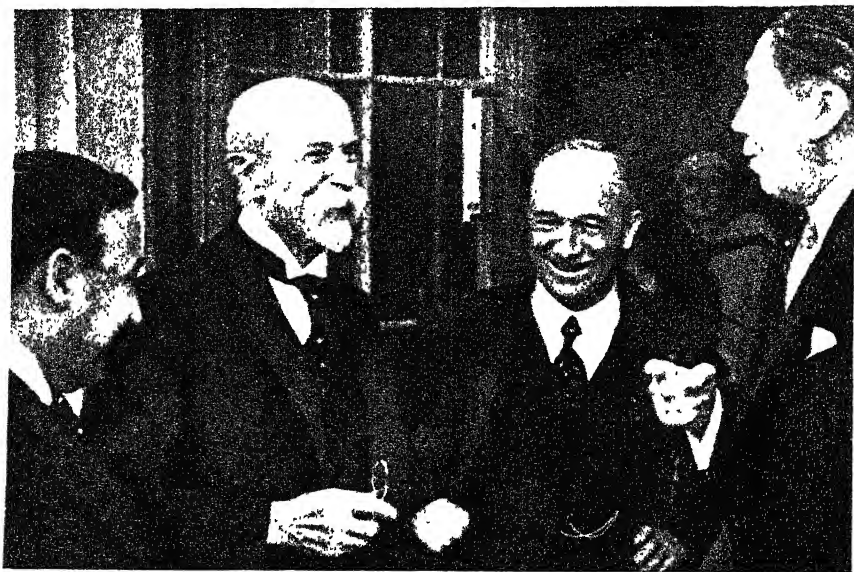


THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE, GENEVA
Dr Benes in the chair at the seventh Labour Conference in Geneva.



THREE STATESMEN

President T. G. Masaryk, Louis Barthou, and Dr Beneš.



THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF THE LITTLE ENTENTE

Dr Beneš of Czechoslovakia, Jevtić of Yugoslavia, and Titulescu of Rumania are President Masaryk's guests.



MOSCOW, 1935
Dr Beneš is being met by Foreign Commissar Litvinov.



PRAGUE, 1935
Dr Beneš with Anthony Eden, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.



· MASTER AND DISCIPLE

Masaryk and Beneš, an ideal partnership in the field of politics, diplomacy, and government.

CHAPTER XVII

It was on May 7th that Mr Basil Newton and M. de Lacroix, the British and French Ministers, expressed the desire of their Governments that Czechoslovakia would save the peace of Europe by going to the limit in the way of concessions to the German minority. It was a completely otiose step, because it was, or should have been, clear that Dr Beneš was every bit as anxious as the doves of Downing Street and the Quai d'Orsay to find an olive-twig. However, the two Ministers were authorized to say that a Nationalities Statute was being prepared, which it was hoped would satisfy the Sudeten Germans. In view of this it is a pity that Konrad Henlein should have been encouraged to visit England a few days later and have his self-importance inflated by being granted interviews with various permanent officials and politicians. In London this deferential gymnasium-instructor in spectacles insisted upon his loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic and denied that his movement was separatist. London did not see him with his *Kampftrupp*—a gang of thugs on the Nazi model with white shirts instead of brown. It was unfortunate that just before Henlein's arrival in London the Prime Minister, at a luncheon given by the Astors to some American journalists on May 10th, had observed that the Czechoslovak Republic was an artificial creation which "could not survive in its present form" and that a frontier revision might be advisable, even more unfortunate that at the same lunch he should have voiced his conviction that neither France nor Russia would go to war about Czechoslovakia. That indiscretion was the measure of poor Chamberlain's passion for peace, which blinded him to every other consideration; it was like an elderly gentleman's self-destroying infatuation for a young girl.

A statement from Moscow signed by Kalinin was issued, pledging Soviet Russia to support Czechoslovakia if she were the victim of an unprovoked attack. Nevertheless, there was continuous propaganda both in London and in Paris designed to throw doubt on Russian intentions.

Almost immediately after Henlein got back to Czechoslovakia he went to Berchtesgaden. This caused a good deal of apprehension because his sudden disappearance occurred just before the holding of the first batch of municipal elections. The Henleinists, who had been terrorizing

the other German parties, had succeeded in absorbing all of them except the Socialists, and they expected an overwhelming victory. The tale went that they would declare this a victory for independence and obtain armed support from Germany. The disappearance of Henlein and news that the Nazis were concentrating troops behind the frontier in Saxony seemed to confirm the story of a *coup d'état*. Moreover, the German Press and wireless were full of invented atrocities against the Sudetens, and headquarters of the Sudeten German Party issued a *communiqué* declaring that they could no longer restrain individuals from using the resources of their own strength against Socialist, Communist, and Czech violence. This was published on May 20th. On the same day Dr Hodža, the Prime Minister, explained to leading Czechoslovak journalists the main lines of the proposed Nationalities Statute with which it was hoped to allay the agitation.

He said:¹

“No State and no Government has ever been in a situation like ours. We live in the immediate neighbourhood of a singular and elemental process of world-history. The nationalism of a people of seventy-five millions, who have entered a phase in which their nationalism has become rooted in emotion, is now reaching a climax. The Czechoslovak Government has to solve a problem of the utmost responsibility. It will solve it, on the one hand by using the principles of national justice, while on the other preventing every attempt at suppression, terror, or disintegration, and preserving the authority of the State. That is why no conflagration will take place within Czechoslovak territory. Negotiations with the Sudeten Germans and other minorities are imminent. The solution will certainly interfere deeply with the structure of our State. The negotiations with the Sudeten Germans will lead to a slow transfer of responsibility to this Party. If certain rights are demanded from a State, at the same time the responsibility of helping the State to fulfil what it regards as its mission must be shouldered.”

While the Prime Minister was talking thus reasonably in Prague the President was discoursing with like reasonableness at Tábor. He begged the radicals of both sides, Czech and German, to be moderate. His whole speech was a sermon upon the virtues of the golden mean. There were many of his hearers who thought such reasonableness was wasted upon the human material with which he was trying to deal fairly, and, indeed, Dr Beneš did appear to have reached the point when tolerance becomes feebleness. There was no feebleness. Before that gathering at Tábor President Beneš as Commander-in-Chief had summoned the

¹ Quoted by Eugene Lenhoff. *In Defence of Dr Beneš and Czech Democracy*, pp. 97, 98.

Supreme Defence Council and the Cabinet to meet. Instant mobilization had been decided on; but word came before the meeting broke up that the British Ambassador in Berlin had received an assurance that the German concentration of troops meant nothing, and partial mobilization was substituted, one class of reservists being called up and all the specialist troops.

At Tábor later on that day Dr Beneš said:

"We are now living through the most serious times since the end of the war. We must avoid all the mistakes of the past. That means we must not be afraid of the days to come. We must be ready to face all eventualities, good or bad. Nothing—absolutely nothing—will be able to shatter our democratic system."

That night the fortifications of the "Little Maginot Line" were manned. There was to be no Austrian invasion for the Germans, even if Golden Prague should be bombed into ruins by Goering's *Luftwaffe*.

The partial mobilization was accomplished with complete efficiency and calm during the night. London and Paris jittered over that weekend. If Hitler should give the order to march London and Paris saw no way out of war. Significantly, and to shrewd observers ominously, the French Government, which with those pacts with Czechoslovakia and Russia might have considered itself more deeply involved in immediate events, left the diplomatic lead to the British Government.

When Sir Nevile Henderson had called at the Wilhelmstrasse to ask what the German concentration meant, Ribbentrop had declared that there was no thought of invading Czechoslovakia and that there were no abnormal troop movements. A routine exercise had been exaggerated by the Czechoslovak Government in order to find an excuse for provocation. The Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin was informed that no troop concentrations had been directed against his country, but he was also informed that unless Czechoslovakia changed her policy Germany would eventually "march in to the rescue" of the persecuted German minority. That there was a concentration of 400,000 German troops on the Czechoslovak frontiers is certain. Whether Hitler intended to give the word to march and was taken aback and deterred by the unexpected firmness of the British attitude—let us make the most of this firmness, for we shall not see it again until after Dunkirk two years later—and the partial mobilization in Czechoslovakia, or whether he made a show of force in order to test the British and French reaction to it is not known. The latter explanation may be more probable. The amount of vocal energy he devoted to accusing Dr Beneš of having invented the German mobilization for his own ends may

indicate that he had not yet made up his mind to invade Czechoslovakia at that date. It is hardly worth while speculating upon the intentions of such a liar as Hitler.

Whatever Hitler's intentions were, the man he regarded as primarily responsible for the defiance of himself was Dr Beneš, and the intense personal hatred Beneš inspired in that evil creature is the measure of his worth, the tribute to his achievement. Partly owing to Hitler's personal accusations against Dr Beneš an idea spread abroad that it was the President who was opposed to granting concessions to the Henleinists. In point of fact, he went beyond everybody else in his desire to preserve peace by advocating concessions. "It became necessary for the President to exercise his authority," said Dr Hubert Ripka¹, whose knowledge of the situation is incontrovertible, "in order to persuade the Czechoslovak public to accept the ever-increasing sacrifices which were demanded of it in connexion with nationality operations. President Beneš, careless of his personal popularity, which necessarily suffered under those circumstances, never shrank from exerting himself to the point of self-sacrifice. . . . Those Agrarian politicians who, for various reasons, had advocated compromise with the Sudeten German Party, retired into the background during the decisive months . . . only too glad that the full weight of responsibility was assumed by President Beneš."

G. E. R. Gedye says:²

"Meantime the British Government (although, as we know, Mr Chamberlain was secretly decided on the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia) became alarmed at the idea that Germany would act so precipitately that Czechoslovakia would have the chance of defending herself, that France and Russia would support her and that Britain after all would have to defend the Czechoslovak bastion—and at that in conjunction with Soviet Russia—and thus in the end bring about the fall of Hitler."

So perhaps that firmness was merely the stiffness terror sometimes induces.

On May 23rd Henlein came back from Hitler and had an interview with Dr Hodža in Prague. He was not amenable to reason, refused to consider the Government's proposed Nationalities Statute, and demanded instant demobilization. We can say now that there was only one way in which the Czechoslovak Government might have avoided what was in store for the country. That would have been to produce the Nationalities Statute immediately, place upon the Henleinists the

¹ *Munich : Before and After* (Gollancz, 1939), p. 24.

² *Fallen Bastions* (Gollancz, 1940), p. 412.

onus of acceptance or refusal, remain in mobilized defiance, and if attacked call upon France and Russia. Unfortunately, Beneš was in the same position as every other European statesman. He might feel positive that it was useless to appease Hitler, but to assume that and provoke war was to face a moral responsibility beyond the courage of any man. He believed it to be his duty to the world to make the utmost sacrifices for peace, and of this belief the British and the French Governments took advantage. It suited French diplomacy to let Britain take the lead.

Early in July the British Government pressed for the speedy production of the Nationalities Statute, over which in view of its radical alteration of the Constitution of the Republic the Czech Government was surely entitled to be somewhat deliberate. The very fact that German propaganda was pouring forth stories of Czech violence which were completely false should have warned even the slow-witted Chamberlain that there was no desire in Germany to achieve a settlement, that, in fact, a settlement would have seriously upset German plans.

In the middle of July that sinister creature Captain Fritz Wiedemann, who had been Hitler's company commander in the war and was now entrusted by the ex-corporal with confidential missions abroad, arrived in London and had a conversation with Lord Halifax in his private house. This took place on the eve of the Royal visit to Paris, and whatever may have been discussed the proposal to send an adviser to Prague was the outcome, a proposal to which presumably Daladier and Bonnet gave their approval when Lord Halifax talked matters over with them in Paris during the Royal visit.

The 'adviser' chosen by Chamberlain was Lord Runciman. Why Lord Runciman was chosen has long since passed into the dim realm of eternal conjecture.

The *Annual Register* for 1938 records:

"A request to undertake the task was made to Lord Runciman, as a man possessing the right degree of ability, experience, and detachment, and was accepted by him without demur, though he by no means minimized the difficulties confronting him, quaintly comparing himself to a man set adrift in a rowing boat in mid-Atlantic."

Ability Lord Runciman may have possessed, but it was certainly not the right degree of ability. Experience Lord Runciman may have possessed, but marine experience even if it be coupled with the political experience that any rich man can enjoy to-day was certainly not the most serviceable for a country in the very heart of Europe. Detachment Lord Runciman may have possessed, if by that was implied the unlikelihood of a shipowner's commercial interest in a country so far

inland; but detachment about the political situation in Czechoslovakia Lord Runciman could not possess because he was attached in advance by the British Prime Minister to a preconceived policy. *Noblesse oblige*, and Lord Runciman accepted his difficult task without demur; but why it should be considered 'quaint' for a man to accept a position which should have been one of immense responsibility in the spirit of a nincompoop it is hard to understand. In fact, a figurehead from one of his father's old ships would have effected as much in Czechoslovakia as Lord Runciman.

"Lord Runciman arrived in Prague on August 3rd, and was immediately introduced at the station to the Henleinist leaders Herr Kundt and Dr Sebekowsky by the British Minister to Czechoslovakia, Mr Basil Newton. On the following day he paid many brief formal calls on President Beneš, Premier Hodža, and Foreign Minister Krofta, and had a long conference with the Sudeten leaders. This curtain-raiser to Lord Runciman's performance was considered in Prague as creating at once such difficulties as might have arisen had the French at the time of the Irish troubles just before the Rebellion in 1916 sent an elderly retired French statesman to negotiate with the British Government and the Irish rebels on an equal footing. The arrival of the mission gave enormous encouragement to Germany which was exemplified in a great intensification of radio and Press propaganda against the Czechs from the Reich which grew steadily more violent throughout the existence of the mission, and within the country by increased intransigence of the Henleinist leaders and tireless endeavours to provoke dangerous 'incidents.' The only advantage which Czechoslovakia saw in the presence of Lord Runciman was that he could presumably be relied on to fulfil the function of a mascot by preventing any sudden rain of bombs on the capital."

The above extract is not taken from some partisan journalist of the Left, but from the *Annual Register* for 1938, and in all those volumes stretching back to the reign of George II it would be difficult to find such another contemptuous description of a British statesman's behaviour.

But the whole business was so contemptible. Chamberlain had issued a statement that Lord Runciman was being sent out as 'adviser' at the request of the Czechoslovak Government. This was at once denied in Prague, where it was stated that the Czechoslovak Government had simply been notified that Lord Runciman was coming out and had then requested that, if he had to come at all, he should arrive while negotiations with the Henleinists were still in progress. Chamberlain tried to recover his dignity by changing the title "adviser" to "conciliator and

mediator." He was obviously thinking of the trade disputes with which he, and no doubt his emissary also, was better equipped to deal with than intricate foreign affairs. Furthermore, it was explained that Lord Runciman was coming in a private capacity and not as representing the British Government. In view of the utter abnegation of his country's dignity it was as well that Chamberlain did choose Lord Runciman. Posterity, which will not have suffered directly from that visit, will be able to laugh at the picture of this puritan shipping-magnate "adrift in a rowing-boat in mid-Atlantic"—or off the sea-coast of Bohemia.

It is not worth while recounting in detail his negotiations with the Henleinists, because there was no intention on their side to do anything except protract matters until Hitler was ready to strike and apparently no intention on Lord Runciman's side to do anything except agree to whatever the Henleinists demanded and persuade the Czechoslovak Government to accept those demands. His task was made as comfortable as possible by week-ends with the German or Germanized Czech aristocracy, at whose castles he was able to meet the Henleinist leaders. Konrad Henlein and himself were fellow-guests on August 18th at the castle of Prince Max Egon of Hohenlohe-Langenburg. It seemed odd to the Czechs that Lord Runciman should attach such importance to staying only with the 'right people' and yet not find it undignified to perform mental jerks at the bidding of a gymnastic-instructor.

Meanwhile, throughout that August the Germans were making a great display of troop massing and of building up their western fortifications. The French said nothing. It was left to Sir John Simon to issue at Lanark on August 27th what apparently was intended to be a British warning to Germany. All it consisted of was a reiteration of Chamberlain's hard-wrung declaration of March 24th that if war broke out "it would be quite impossible to say where it would end and what Governments might become involved."

"To find a solution for the controversy in Czechoslovakia," Sir John Simon went on, "contributions from all concerned are needed. We are convinced that given goodwill on both sides, it should be possible to find a solution which is just to all legitimate interests. And there is no need to emphasize the importance of finding a peaceful solution. For in the modern world there is no limit to the reactions of war."

That well-chewed string of evasive platitudes was useless as a warning because it merely encouraged the German belief that Britain was going soft. What was wanted was the British Fleet clearing the decks for action, not Sir John Simon clearing his throat for words. As for the goodwill request from both sides, that was already being

displayed by the Czechs, but none was forthcoming from the Germans. A Third Plan, after two others had been rejected, had now been put forward through the initiative of Lord Runciman by which the whole country was to be divided into cantons. It was generous in the extreme, so generous that President Beneš was already risking his own position with his people by putting it forward. It may be added that this plan was produced by Lord Runciman after the conversations he and Mr Ashton-Gwatkin had indulged in with the Henleinists, and Dr Beneš, to give them more proof of his goodwill, accepted it.

"The real danger came never from the open enemy," writes G. E. R. Gedye,¹ "but from the false friend, for that was the attack to which no resistance could be offered, since it came always in the subtle guise of warnings and of good counsel. And all of it—open attack, false friendship and (carefully concealed) pressure to disastrous surrender—centred on one little iron-nerved man . . . Edvard Beneš. . . . The President's steadiness and endurance were but the reflection of that shown by all his people."

Mr Ashton-Gwatkin flew to London to put the Third Plan of cantonal self-government before Lord Halifax, and while he was away Henlein on August 26th issued a proclamation ordering his followers to "resort to self-defence, to put an end to the provocation of Marxist and irresponsible Czech elements." We who have heard that kind of accusation in that kind of phraseology made by the Nazis so often since to justify their bestialities are familiar with the line, but at that date it was still a novelty, and people in Britain, who were not at all well served by their Press at that time, supposed there must be some truth in it.

When Mr Ashton-Gwatkin returned from London with Lord Halifax's approval of the cantonal proposals Lord Runciman remonstrated mildly with Henlein about his "self-defence" proclamation, and then advised him to go and consult Hitler about the Third Plan.

In giving this advice to Henlein, Lord Runciman was presumably acting in accordance with instructions from the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary delivered by Mr Gwatkin. Even with the expert advice of a Foreign Office Counsellor, he would hardly have ventured to take such a step on his own initiative. Henlein went off to Berchtesgaden. Goering, Goebbels, and Rudolf Hess were in Obersalzburg. While Henlein was being given his instructions by Hitler Dr Beneš on September 2nd received Kundt and Sebekowski to put before them Plan Three, but he found the two Henleinist Deputies intransigent.

¹ *Fallen Bastions*, p. 421.

Berlin announced on September 3rd that Hitler and Henlein had reached complete agreement, which, so Mr Gwatkin was informed by Henlein, who had returned from Berchtesgaden, meant that Hitler had refused to consider the Prague Government's Third Plan.

More pressure was brought to bear on Dr Beneš, and on September 6th the President summoned a meeting of the Cabinet. He told his Ministers that he could stand up no longer to the pressure from London and Paris. He was now convinced that if Czechoslovakia would not go to the utmost limit, she could not expect any support from Britain or France. Therefore he had torn up Plan Three and devised a Fourth Plan which practically conceded all the demands of the Karlsbad Eight Points. Indeed, the only one completely rejected was the demand for the official recognition of Nazi philosophy and policy, which would have meant the renunciation of democracy and the abandonment of the alliances with France and Russia. However, as a token of goodwill a loan of 700 million Czech crowns was proposed for what were to be the German *gaue*, or administrative areas: the *gauleiter* did not yet stink in the nostrils of humanity. Plan Four seemed nothing less than complete capitulation to the Henleinists; but Dr Beneš was determined to make the sacrifice and establish his countrymen as reasonable for the sake of European peace, and the Cabinet accepted his judgment. Yet he already suspected the Henlein party of playing a dangerous game and of refusing to accept any proposal, however conciliatory.

Deputy Kundt was received by the President, who gave him an outline of Plan Four. At this last moment Dr Beneš reflected upon the only alternative—the rejection by the Henleinists of their own plan. He began to believe that they would reject it, and if they did then Great Britain and France *must* take a firm stand beside Czechoslovakia. Kundt was in a quandary. The new proposals were so generous that he and the other leaders of the Sudeten Germans were likely to find it difficult to persuade the majority that Plan Four ought to be rejected. Yet it was essential for Hitler's next move that negotiations should be broken off. Kundt left the Castle and went off with K. H. Frank to the Nazi Party Conference at Nuremberg, where Plan Four was sent after him by courier.

Meanwhile, *The Times* on September 7th published an editorial in which it was proposed to solve the problem of Czechoslovakia by transferring to Germany the whole of the Sudeten territory.

Hitler told the Henleinists that there must be an 'incident' in order to provide an excuse for breaking off negotiations before Plan Four was

published. It was provided on September 8th. The Henleinists made a demonstration outside the prison at Moravská Ostrava, where some of them were in gaol for gun-running. A Henleinist deputy seized the bridle of one of the mounted police, who struck him a glancing blow on the shoulder with his riding-whip. Forthwith, the Nazi radio began to blare horrifying stories about Sudeten men, women, children, and deputies being brutally flogged by the Czech police. Negotiations were broken off, not to be renewed until reparation had been made for the Moravská Ostrava outrage.

Four days passed, days of anxious waiting for Hitler's speech at Nuremberg. On September 8th the British Home Fleet prepared for the autumn manœuvres in the North Sea, and French naval reservists were called to Brest and Toulon. On September 10th Goering made the violent speech in which he declared it was intolerable that a nation of wretched pygmies whose origin was unknown should dare to behave as it was behaving towards a great civilized nation. The British were advised to look after the little Jewish State of which they had taken charge and stop civil war there instead of preaching about peace. Germany had never been so powerful. A blockade or an invasion of the Reich was now impossible.

Next day Bonnet went to Geneva, where the Assembly of the League was sitting, and Mr Chamberlain authorized a statement in the Press to the effect that Lord Runciman had solved so many difficulties that as long as he remained in Prague there was no reason why a solution should not be found. The statement went on to warn Germany that she could not with impunity carry out a rapid and successful military campaign against Czechoslovakia without the risk of intervention by France and even Great Britain; but Mr Chamberlain's admonitory forefinger made no impression on the Yahoos of Berlin. It may be asked why Daladier did not publish a warning also. The depressing answer is that the French Government was even more frightened than the British Government of its own impotence. Lord Runciman, who was spending his Sunday as usual in being entertained by a German aristocrat, was hailed outside the castle by Henleinist demonstrators as the liberator of the Sudeten Germans. Bonnet had been spending his Sunday less strictly at Geneva, where he had discussed the situation with Litvinov and the Rumanian Foreign Minister. When he returned to Paris on Monday, September 12th, he was able to inform the Cabinet that Litvinov had assured him that Russia would come to the aid of Czechoslovakia if Germany attacked her as soon as the League Council had declared her the victim of aggression. This was necessary to give

Rumania the legal right to let Russian troops pass through her territory to reach Czechoslovakia. It was generally known, however, that Bonnet had implied that the Russian guarantee was not to be trusted.

At seven o'clock that evening Hitler made his speech. When it came to an end the persecuted and harried Germans, whose total casualties during the "Hussite terror" had been two motor-cyclists shot on May 25th by Czech frontier guards when they refused to stop, came surging out into the streets of the towns and villages and started their armed revolt, expecting that, as in Austria, the German Army would come marching across the frontier to protect them. Czech and Jewish shops were looted. Swastika flags were flown. German democrats were seized and dragged across the frontier for the concentration camps. Czech girl clerks were kidnapped from post-offices and shut up in German prisons. Bombs were thrown. Women were savagely beaten. Czech police were shot at. Twelve persons were killed that night, and by the evening of September 13th the dead numbered twenty-three.

The Czechoslovak Government without consulting Lord Runciman proclaimed martial law in the German areas, and with the arrival of Czechoslovak police reinforcements and the non-arrival of the German army the rebellion collapsed. Members of the Runciman mission went to Asch; but the gymnasium-instructor refused to receive them, and on September 15th he and Deputy Frank fled to Germany, where at a microphone in Leipzig Henlein proclaimed the desire of the Sudeten Germans "to go home to the Reich." The German Minister, Von Eisenlohr, ostentatiously left Prague for Berlin. Lord Runciman returned to London. Mr Chamberlain flew to Berchtesgaden.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE moral collapse which Great Britain and France underwent in September 1938 seemed due to fear. Moreover, it was not fear of a long, bloody, and costly war but the panic fear of immediate bombardment from the air. This must be stressed because it is already being forgotten after what both nations have endured from the war when it did come, as it inevitably had to come when Germany was allowed to rearm. The moral courage of the people of America was magnificent in that September: they were far out of range of the German bombers. The people of Great Britain stood up to the enemy more defiantly than the people of France in June 1940: they had the Channel as an anti-tank ditch. It was easy for the people of America to recognize that Neville Chamberlain's journey to Berchtesgaden was a humiliating—indeed, an ignominious—surrender: to the peoples of Britain and France it appeared an act of moral courage sublime in its self-abnegation. It was as if old Noah, instead of sending out birds, had himself dived out of one of the windows of the Ark into the raging waters in search of land.

The surrender to Mussolini over Abyssinia had angered the people of Britain because they never for a moment fancied that Italy would dare to fight. That surrender they blamed upon Mr Baldwin, and Mr Baldwin would soon have vanished ingloriously from the public scene if he had not been afforded an opportunity to rehabilitate himself over the Royal Marriage. His manner of presenting the Abdication placed upon the country the maximum of emotional strain at a time when what was happening in Germany had a paramount claim to the country's attention. Chamberlain's willingness to risk his own reputation as a statesman by doing something positive caught the public imagination. It was a unique experience for the electorate.

The policy of the National Government at home and abroad, since it obtained power in 1931 by what when stripped of its political trimmings was nothing better than a commonplace financial swindle, had been a long inertia from which it occasionally roused itself to unimaginative obstruction or muddled agreement. The people of Britain seemed in the mood to drift along with their Government. There had been political crisis after crisis on the Continent which had irritated them because they were bad for business; but the man in

the street did not believe at all that war might be the result of one of these crises. Therefore, when it was announced that Mr Chamberlain had flown over to see Hitler his journey caused as much surprise as Enoch's must have caused when the celestial chariot called to take him aloft. It made people realize with a shock that war *might* come. They remembered all the blood-curdling forecasts of what the next war would be like. The only shelter against air raids that seemed worthy of the name was the shelter of Mr Chamberlain's umbrella. The French were as grateful as the British, let it be added, because they were committed by their bond to go to the help of Czechoslovakia; and as most of the members of M. Daladier's Government were extremely anxious to renege Mr Chamberlain's bright idea was welcome as an excuse. When it proved so popular M. Daladier claimed that it was his own bright idea over the telephone.

While the Prime Minister was in the train on the way from Munich to Obersalzberg the German radio stations were broadcasting Henlein's announcement that all attempts to "bring the Czech nation and those responsible for it to an honest and just compromise have wrecked themselves against their implacable desire to destroy us," and that the only possibility now was "for the Sudeten Germans to return to the Reich." So when Chamberlain reached Berchtesgaden he found that he had to discuss with Hitler not Plan Four but the annexation of the Sudeten Germans. Furthermore, he was told that the rebellion was still raging, whereas it had already been crushed by the proclamation of martial law. Indeed, by September 17th complete tranquillity and order had been restored throughout Czechoslovakia, and the German Social Democrats were becoming actively vocal against the Henleinists. A deputation of the Germanized Czech nobility declared to President Beneš their desire that the old frontiers of the Bohemian Crown should remain inviolate.

It was a pity that Lord Runciman hurried back to London on September 16th with the material for his biased report before he had time to see the tranquillizing effect of the martial law he had been preventing the Czechoslovak Government from proclaiming before.

When Chamberlain proposed that visit to Berchtesgaden he gave Ribbentrop the opportunity to insist to Hitler how right he had been in his confidence that Britain would not fight. Therefore Hitler felt safe in threatening that he would rescue the Sudeten Germans even at the cost of another European war. In a way this was just what Chamberlain wanted to be told because it lulled any doubts he may have felt about the wisdom of what he could not help fancying was a

heroically unconventional gesture. When he heard Hitler talk like that about war he was convinced that it really was thanks only to his angelic flight that Europe was still at peace. He told Parliament as much. Yet he had made up his mind nearly six months ago that France would not honour her word. He could scarcely have supposed that the League of Nations, whose Annual Assembly was now sitting, would or could do anything to save the little nation which had always been its most loyal supporter. In fact, during that tragic September the only voices in Geneva that dared to make specific mention of Czechoslovakia came from the delegates of Russia and Republican Spain. Why, then, did Mr Chamberlain go to Berchtesgaden? It cannot have been to save the face of France. It certainly was not to rescue Czechoslovakia. Why did he take with him as the only representative of the Foreign Office Mr William Strang? Why was a diplomat with practical experience of Russia required? Surely it was a mistake to give the Germans a chance to whisper, as whisper they did, that Mr Chamberlain had tried to direct Hitler's territorial aspirations towards the Soviet Union.

Anyway, the net result of the visit was that Mr Chamberlain went back next day to London with an ultimatum from Hitler. He was to persuade his Government to agree to the annexation of all Czechoslovak territory with more than 50 per cent. of a German population, in return for which Hitler would promise not to invade Czechoslovakia unless anything happened there which made it imperative to do so. Then Mr Chamberlain would have to come and see him again to discuss the method of the annexation.

On Sunday, September 18th, Daladier and Bonnet arrived in London to discuss, in the words of Mr Chamberlain to the House of Commons, "a solution which would not bring about an European war, and therefore, a solution which would not automatically compel France to take action in accordance with her obligations." So perhaps after all it was to save the face of France, and France, not Peace, was Don Quixote's Dulcinea. Perhaps the flight was M. Daladier's idea, and Mr Chamberlain was his radiant Ariel. Anyway, the happy solution reached was that a Note should be sent to the Czechoslovak Government to the effect that after hearing Lord Runciman's account of his mission (his written report had not yet been presented) the British and French Governments had come to the conclusion that districts of the Czechoslovak State with over 50 per cent. of German inhabitants would have to be transferred to the Reich, either directly or after a plebiscite. In justice to Lord Runciman it should be said that even his biased report had not contemplated the cession of districts with less than

75 per cent. Germans as "a contribution to the pacification of Europe." His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom would be prepared to join in an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czechoslovak State against unprovoked aggression. Yet even this smear of self-righteous ointment had a fly in it. It was to be a general guarantee which would replace existing treaties involving "reciprocal obligations of a military character." That would tear up the Czechoslovak-Russian Pact of Mutual Aid for Hitler to put the fragments in his wastepaper-basket.

Both the French and the British Governments graciously recognized how great was "the sacrifice thus required of Czechoslovakia in the cause of peace," and finally they asked for an answer at the "earliest possible moment" because "the Prime Minister must resume conversations with Herr Hitler not later than Wednesday, and earlier if possible."

This Note was handed officially to President Beneš at noon on Monday, September 19th, by the British and French Ministers in Prague. (How Mr Chamberlain hoped to receive a reply in time to take it to Herr Hitler earlier than Wednesday, September 21st, is beyond guessing. He could not have managed it by magic carpet let alone by plans.

After discussions which lasted day and night at the President's Palace the President, the Government, and the representatives of all Czechoslovak political parties approved the following answer written by the President to the British and French Governments on September 20th:

"The Czechoslovak Government thank the British and French Governments for the report transmitted, in which they express their opinion on a solution of the present international difficulties concerning Czechoslovakia. Conscious of the responsibilities they bear in the interests of Czechoslovakia, her friends and allies, and in the interest of general peace, they express their conviction that the proposals contained in the report are incapable of altering the aims which the British and French Governments expect from them in their great effort to preserve peace.

"These proposals were made without consultation with the representatives of Czechoslovakia. They were negotiated against Czechoslovakia, without hearing her case, though the Czechoslovak Government has pointed out that it cannot take responsibility for a declaration made without its consent. It is hence understandable that the proposals mentioned could not be such as to be acceptable to Czechoslovakia.

"The Czechoslovak Government cannot for constitutional reasons take a decision which would affect their frontiers. Such a decision would not be possible without violating the democratic regime and juridical order of the Czechoslovak State. In any case it would be necessary to consult Parliament.

"In the view of the Government, the acceptance of such a proposal would amount to a voluntary and complete mutilation of the State in every respect, Czechoslovakia would be completely paralysed in regard to economics and communications, and from a strategic point of view her position would become extremely difficult. Sooner or later she would fall under the complete domination of Germany.

"Even if Czechoslovakia should make the sacrifices proposed, the question of peace would by no means be solved.

"(a) Many Sudeten Germans would, for well-known reasons, prefer to leave the Reich and would still settle in the democratic atmosphere of the Czechoslovak State. New difficulties and new nationality conflicts would be the result.

"(b) The mutilation of Czechoslovakia would lead to a profound political change in the whole of Central and South-Eastern Europe. The balance of forces in Central Europe and in Europe as a whole would be completely destroyed: it would have the most far-reaching consequences for all other States and especially for France.

"(c) The Czechoslovak Government are sincerely grateful to the Great Powers for their intention of guaranteeing the integrity of Czechoslovakia; they appreciate it and value it highly. Such a guarantee would certainly open the way to an agreement between all interested Powers, if the present nationality conflicts were settled amicably and in such a manner as not to impose unacceptable sacrifices on Czechoslovakia.

"Czechoslovakia has during recent years given many proofs of her unshakable devotion to peace. At the instance of her friends, the Czechoslovak Government has gone so far in the negotiations about the Sudeten-German question that it has been acknowledged with gratitude by the whole world—also a British Government pronouncement stressed that it is necessary not to exceed the bounds of the Czechoslovak Constitution—and even the Sudeten-German Party did not reject the last proposals of the Government but publicly expressed its conviction that the intentions of the Government were serious and sincere. In spite of the fact that a revolt has just broken out among a part of the Sudeten population which has been instigated from abroad, the Government has again declared solemnly that it still adheres to the proposals which

had met the wishes of the Sudeten-German minority. Even to-day it considers this solution realizable as far as the nationality questions of the Republic are concerned.

"Czechoslovakia has always remained faithful to her treaties and fulfilled her obligations resulting from them, whether in the interests of her friends or of the League of Nations and its members or the other nations. She was resolved and is still resolved to fulfil them in any circumstances. If she now resists the possibility of the application of force, she does so on the basis of recent obligations and declarations of her neighbour and also on the basis of the arbitration treaty of October 16th, 1936, which the present German Government has recognized as valid in several pronouncements. The Czechoslovak Government emphasizes that this treaty can be applied and asks that this should be done. As it respects its signature, it is prepared to accept any sentence of arbitration which might be pronounced. This would limit any conflict. It would make possible a quick and honourable solution which would be worthy of all interested States.

"Czechoslovakia has always been bound to France by respect and most devoted friendship and an alliance which no Czechoslovak Government and no Czechoslovak will ever violate. She has lived and still lives in the belief in the great French nation, whose Government has so frequently assured her of the firmness of their friendship. She is bound to Great Britain by the traditional friendship and respect with which Czechoslovakia will always be inspired, by the indissoluble co-operation between the two countries and thus also by the common effort for peace, whatever conditions in Europe prevail.

"The Czechoslovak Government appreciates that the effort of the British and French Governments have their source in real sympathy. It thanks them for it sincerely. Nevertheless, for reasons already stated, it appeals to them again and for the last time and asks them to reconsider their opinion. It does so in the conviction that it is defending not only its own interests but also the interests of its friends, the cause of peace, and the cause of healthy development in Europe. At this decisive moment, it is not only a question of the fate of Czechoslovakia, but also the fate of other countries and especially of France."

The text of this poignant and yet completely dignified Note written by Dr Beneš himself was not published in London or Paris. Neither the British nor the French Government dared to let it be published. Yet they need not have been afraid. So skilfully had propaganda done its work that the great majority of the British and French people were convinced by now that the only thing which stood between them and

the prospect of peace was Czech obstinacy over the right of three and a half million unhappy Germans to get into bed with Hitler. That these eager brides would bring as their dowry acres of land which had been Bohemian for a thousand years and eighty million pounds' worth of the most modern fortifications stolen from the Czechoslovak Republic did not matter: the people were becoming inured to moral shocks. Spain, Abyssinia, Albania, the Abdication, the Stavisky scandal, the Jewish pogroms, the purges in Russia, the behaviour of the Metaxists in Greece . . . the people were disillusioned. What did one more disgrace count? Anything was better than war.

Besides, France and Britain were not ready for war. Chamberlain knew that. He was playing for time. What else could he do? It was not his fault that Baldwin had been frightened by the Labour Party out of rearmament.

When Dr Krofta, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, presented that note to the British and French Ministers on the evening of September 20th, Mr Basil Newton declared immediately that if the Czechoslovak Government rejected the Anglo-French proposals the British Government would express indifference to anything that might happen. Mr Newton had been Minister in Berlin before he came to Prague. M. de Lacroix, although he had to associate himself with his British colleague's observations, was conscious of his country's shame and did not give the personal offence which apparently Mr Newton's manners were not urbane enough to avoid. Indeed, M. de Lacroix shed honourable tears. It is a relief to be able to add that the National Council of Labour issued a manifesto on September 20th stating that "it heard with dismay of the reported proposals for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia under the brutal threat of armed force by Nazi Germany, and without prior consultation with the Czechoslovak Government." It declared this to be "a shameful betrayal of a peaceful and democratic people, constituting a dangerous precedent for the future." London representatives of the French Socialist Party and French trade unions were invited to confer with the Labour Council, but they turned out to be very hesitant about bringing pressure to bear on their own Government to preserve the integrity of Czechoslovakia.

Mr Attlee wrote to the Prime Minister, urging him to summon Parliament immediately that it might be consulted "before Britain was committed to a grave departure from declared British policy." Mr Chamberlain replied that he was engaged in "delicate and difficult negotiations and that to require him to take part in debates while these were still in progress would make his task impossible."

Shortly after 1 A.M. on the night of the 20th-21st the two Ministers telephoned to the Castle for an immediate interview with the President. Dr Beneš received them at 2 A.M., when Mr Newton handed to him the instructions he had received from London:

"In the opinion of His Majesty's Government, the reply of the Czechoslovak Government does not meet the critical situation which the Anglo-French proposals were designed to remove and, if it should be adhered to, would lead, after publication, in the opinion of His Majesty's Government, to an immediate German invasion. His Majesty's Government, therefore appeals to the Czechoslovak Government to retract their answer and to consider speedily an alternative which would take account of realities. On the basis of the answer submitted, His Majesty's Government would not have any hope in a useful result of the proposed second visit to Herr Hitler, and the Prime Minister would be forced to abandon the necessary preparations for it. His Majesty's Government therefore asks the Czechoslovak Government for a speedy and earnest reconsideration before they create a situation for which His Majesty's Government could not take the responsibility.

"His Majesty's Government would certainly be ready to submit the Czechoslovak proposal for arbitration to the German Government if they thought that under given circumstances there was any hope of it being favourably considered. But His Majesty's Government cannot believe for a moment that this proposal would be now acceptable and also do not think that the German Government would consider the situation as one which can be repaired by arbitration, as proposed by the Czechoslovak Government.

"If the Czechoslovak Government, after reconsideration, would still feel compelled to reject this advice, it must have, of course, complete freedom for any action which it considers appropriate in view of the situation which might develop later."

A sorry document, penned without dignity of thought or expression and with two grammatical blunders.

M. de Lacroix made a verbal communication. He told President Beneš that France would not take action if hostilities broke out through a refusal of the Franco-British proposals. In that case Czechoslovakia would be held responsible for having provoked a war. France could not take part in such a war because Great Britain would not stand beside her. Czechoslovakia would have to fight Germany alone. President Beneš wrote down this verbal communication, but asked that it should be presented to him in writing. This led to the circulation

of a lie that the President had invited the French Minister to hand him the ultimatum of the night of September 20th-21st in order to justify himself with his people.

Another lie circulated was that Russia had been ambiguous in her reply to British and French inquiries about her attitude. This was repeated in the House of Commons by Lord Winterton, for which he was put in his place by the Soviet Ambassador and had to withdraw the allegation.

On August 22nd, soon after the German manoeuvres had started, the German Ambassador in Moscow inquired of Litvinov about the attitude of Russia in the event of Germany's taking active measures to help the Sudeten Germans, and he was told that the Soviet Union would implement the 1935 pact with Czechoslovakia. Shortly before Litvinov left for Geneva in September the French Government enquired for the first time what the Soviet Government's attitude would be, and received the reply that the Soviet Government would come to the aid of France and Czechoslovakia with all the means at their disposal. The Military Command was ready to enter into immediate consultation with the French and Czechoslovak General Staffs. On September 19th the Czechoslovak Government asked for the first time whether Russia would intervene if France fulfilled her obligations. The Soviet Government replied with a definite affirmative. On September 21st, while President Beneš was trying to decide what answer to give to the Franco-British *démarche* in the small hours of that morning, Litvinov spoke at the League meeting in Geneva, and after repeating the Soviet assurances complained of the lack of co-operation shown by Great Britain and France.

"He stated that immediately after the Anschluss the Soviet Government had officially approached the other Governments with a suggestion to discuss the consequences of the Anschluss and to take preventive measures against the possibility of further steps by Germany. Russia had been fully aware of the significance of the Anschluss for the position of Czechoslovakia and for the whole of Europe, but unfortunately, the importance of the Russian proposal had not been fully appreciated. The Soviet Government, which had a treaty of mutual assistance with Czechoslovakia, did not wish to interfere in the negotiations with the Sudeten Germans, as they considered the position of that minority a matter of Czechoslovak internal politics. They offered no advice one way or the other, as they did not wish to create the impression that they desired to avoid the fulfilment of their obligations. They appreciated the tactfulness of the Czechoslovak Government in having made

no enquiries as to Soviet readiness to assist them, and the Soviet Government took this as a proof that the Czechs were in no doubt about it.”¹

It would have been impossible for Czechoslovakia to ask for Russian aid after the Franco-British *démarche*. It was clear to President Beneš that should he take such a course, he might find sooner or later the Western Powers fighting beside Germany. Moreover, although the parties on the Right would have accepted combined intervention by France and Russia, it seemed to Beneš that they would have opposed intervention by Russia alone, which would have split national unity and completed the catastrophe.

So Czechoslovakia was isolated. If it had been a question of fighting Germany only the Government might have rejected the *démarche*, and challenged Goliath to do his worst; but there was more. The Poles had let it be known that in the event of isolation they would march against her, that if France only came to her help Poland would stay neutral, but that if Britain joined France Poland would at once declare war on Germany. Colonel Beck's rather sordid realism was not in the best romantic tradition. Besides the threat from Poland which would expose a vital part of her frontier, Czechoslovakia would have to face a simultaneous attack by Hungary, and with Germany involved it was unlikely that either of the other two partners of the Little Entente would attack Hungary.

What broke the heart of Beneš was France's desertion. On her loyalty he had counted until June 1938 almost absolutely. Out of loyalty to her he had gone beyond the limits of reasonableness in the concessions he advocated to the Henleinists. He had imperilled his popularity and undermined his reputation by the appearance of weakness. It was done in order that France could never reproach with ingratitude the little country which she had helped to rebuild from the ruins of the Habsburg Empire and would recognize when she stood beside that little country in arms that she was defending her own soil from the German beast.

True, he had received warnings that the France of 1938 stood not where it did in 1914.

Alas, poor country:
Almost afraid to know itself: it cannot
Be call'd our mother, but our grave.

His mind had been haunted by doubts ever since the spring of 1938, but tried not to believe in such a rumoured degeneracy. The Blum.

¹ *Annual Register*, 1938.

Boncour Government in its note on March 24th, 1938, to the British Government had affirmed its fidelity to the Czechoslovak alliance, and Chamberlain himself had accepted that fidelity in his speech of March 24th. On April 8th, Bonnet authorized the French diplomatic representatives in Moscow, Warsaw, Bucharest, and Prague to state that "France would fulfil her obligations to Czechoslovakia." On April 12th, Daladier had avowed his intention to "demonstrate his fidelity to all the pacts and treaties which France had concluded." On July 12th, Daladier had recognized "the absolute loyalty of the Czechoslovak Government," and affirmed that his country's "solemn engagements towards Czechoslovakia were eternal and sacred." Just over a fortnight back Bonnet had declared that France would remain faithful in all circumstances to her pacts and treaties. And hardly a week ago, after M. Daladier had already agreed with the value of Mr Chamberlain's flight to Hitler, in reply to a direct request from President Beneš the French Minister in Prague had handed him a formal declaration that the French Government was resolved to stand by the alliance, though the wording of their reply was for the first time awkward and obscure.

When the two Ministers left the President at 2.30 A.M. he remained for some time in deep reflection about the course of action his country should take. Finally he decided to inform the Czechoslovak Government of the Franco-British ultimatum. At 6.30 A.M. Dr Hodža summoned the Cabinet to meet, and after a session which lasted till 9 A.M., during which the situation was thoroughly examined, the Cabinet asked the President to prepare the reply to the Powers; opinion was unanimous that Czechoslovakia could not wage war alone against Germany, even with the help that Russia could give. Later the Parliamentary representatives of the Governmental parties heard a detailed report from the Prime Minister and took note of that decision.

Dr Hubert Ripka writes:¹

"I went together with a few friends, to visit President Beneš. Though he was a man accustomed to stand fatigue without showing signs of it, he was quite unrecognizable. For several nights he had not slept, and the events of the previous night had been a most terrible blow for him. He had based his whole policy on the assumption of European co-operation, above all between the democracies of France and Britain. He had clung to that policy even when it was being discarded everywhere else in Central Europe; because he was convinced that in political, as in private affairs, faith must be kept—and now he had lived to see the day when he was abandoned by the representatives

¹ *Munich : Before and After.*

of the Western democracies. We saw before us a man who was physically worn out and mentally crucified, and who would only with the greatest difficulty conceal from us his overwhelming despair. In a voice which could scarcely be heard, he said to us 'We have been disgracefully betrayed'—and yet, even at that time, he tried to encourage us not to lose our faith."

That evening a Government broadcast informed the people of Czechoslovakia of the tragic decision which had been forced upon their leaders. That night great crowds gathered in indignation with the Government of Surrender, and many demanded a military dictatorship of General Syrový, who had commanded the Czechoslovak Legion in Siberia.

At ten o'clock the General addressed the crowd from the Castle:

"I love our Republic just as much as you do. I am conscious of my responsibility. Have confidence in me. Military dictatorship would be of no help to us. You do not know the causes which forced the Government to make its decisions. We cannot lead the nation to suicide."

Demonstrations continued all through that night and the following morning, but there was no disorder. Yet it was obviously necessary for the Government of Dr Hodža to resign. The new Cabinet of General Syrový retained three of the members of the former Government who were not Deputies, and the rest of the portfolios were held by non-Parliamentary figures. On the evening of September 22nd President Beneš broadcast to the nation:

"We have had to act in accordance with existing circumstances of which we are all of us well aware.

"What will happen in the future remains to be seen. I am watching every development calmly and without fear—and I have no fear now for the future of our State. I have made plans for all eventualities, and I cannot be surprised, whatever may occur. I desire an understanding such as is being worked upon—an understanding between the greater nations of the world. If such an understanding is achieved, provided that it is an honourable one, it will be to the advantage also of our nation. It will mean a general appeasement between England and France and Germany, and between our country and Germany. It will mean also our co-operation with other countries, especially with those of Eastern Europe.

"Let us be patient, then, and wait, with our strength unweakened and undisturbed by internal conflict, by lack of confidence, or by excitement and passion. We are a capable and realistic people, which has always understood a dangerous situation when it has arisen, and which knows

when to act and when to fight. If it should be necessary to fight, we shall know how to do so to the last breath. If it is necessary to negotiate, we will negotiate. If we have given way during these difficult days, it is to our honour, and history will prove, some day, that we have given away inevitably and in a progressive spirit, as good Europeans, and that our attitude and actions have been calm, brave, public-spirited and dignified.

"I repeat: I see things clearly and I have my plan. I have confidence in our people, in our nation, and in our State. Our line of policy is firm, and we are trying to act in a thoughtful manner suited to the circumstances and events which are now changing so rapidly. I fully understand the expression of your feelings and your patriotic demonstrations, and I appreciate them, because in their dignified form they are of benefit to the State; but be calm and manly in this crisis, and do not lose your feeling of optimism and that healthy common sense which is so characteristic of us Czechoslovaks.

"Our adversaries are expecting our disintegration and would take advantage of disorder or unrest, so it is essential especially now, during the coming international negotiations, that order shall be maintained. And, above all, let us save our strength. We shall need it. Let us preserve our mental equilibrium. To-day we need it more than ever before.

"Europe is passing through a great crisis, and we—if we remain true to ourselves, firm in the unity of all our parties and movements, and steadfast in our wisdom and preparedness—we shall pass through it successfully and with honour. I repeat: Have no fear for the future of your Fatherland. There have been worse times than these, and we have survived to see better ones again."

Those plans for all eventualities helped to restore public confidence at the time, but after Munich they were held against the President. Those plans were first to gain time at the cost, if necessary, of territorial concessions and reorganize the State for future eventualities; secondly, to reach an agreement with Poland while the negotiations over the details of the Anglo-French proposals were being settled, so that the frontier with Poland would be covered; thirdly, to await events ready for anything, under the conviction that, should Germany, France, and Great Britain achieve a peaceful solution, such a solution could only be temporary and must inevitably end in war with Hitler which would be fought in better circumstances for Czechoslovakia. That was typical of Dr Benes's rapidly working mind. After the shock of the French betrayal he had accepted the inevitability of losing the Sudeten

Germans and was now reconstructing the defences of Central Europe in imagination on a new basis. He was planning to preserve what was left of Czechoslovakia from German domination and to prepare for the inevitable shock of war. Even while he was speaking his optimism was refreshed by the news that Hitler had put up his terms at Godesberg and that Chamberlain had not accepted them. Beneš had visions of the Western democracies resisting in spite of themselves and of Czechoslovakia fighting beside them. Even after Munich he maintained this view and told his friends, asking them to prepare for Hitler's inevitable war.

What had happened at Godesberg? Hitler had chosen this Rhineland town for the tryst in order to spare an old gentleman unnecessary fatigue. It was at Godesberg that he had given the order for the massacre of June 30th, 1934. And that had been such a success.

"I had a very warm welcome in the streets and villages through which I passed," Mr Chamberlain told the House of Commons, "demonstrating to me the desire of the German people for peace." It did not occur to him that he was being cheered for desiring to present them with something for nothing.

"Herr Hitler said he could not accept the proposals worked out with the French Government for effecting the transfer of the territory. He insisted that a speedy solution was essential on account of the oppression and terrorism to which the Sudeten Germans were being subjected."

Mr Chamberlain failed to point out to his host that the only terrorism going on was the terrorism of the *Freikorps* which the Henleinists had raised in Dresden and that every night since September 17th bands of ruffians armed with German hand-grenades had been attacking the Czechoslovak frontier-guards and custom-posts. He failed to point out that these ruffians were using women and children as screens so that if the Czech gendarmes had fired and killed one of them the lying German propaganda could invent another atrocity. He failed to point out that Lord Runciman in his report had discovered a sum total of seventy deaths caused by Nazi violence during the Czech and Communist terror, of which at least half and probably many more were those of unfortunate Czechs attempting to defend themselves. He apparently believed that lying braggart's tales.

"I do not want honourable members to think that he was deliberately deceiving me—I do not think so for one moment—but, for me, I expected that when I got back to Godesberg I had only to discuss quietly with him the proposals that I had brought with me, and it was a profound shock to me when I was told at the beginning of the

conversation that these proposals were not acceptable, and that they were to be replaced by other proposals of a kind which I had not contemplated at all."

So Mr Chamberlain crossed back to his quarters on the other side of the Rhine to think things over, and decided to write a letter to his host before they met next morning. Hitler answered this with a note postponing the talk till the afternoon. Then Mr Chamberlain wrote another letter, and finally, at 10.30 on the night of September 23rd, they met again when Hitler handed Mr Chamberlain a Memorandum and a map "which I described as an ultimatum rather than a memorandum . . . and I bitterly reproached the Chancellor for his failure to respond in any way to the efforts which I had made to secure peace."

Mr Chamberlain was as much taken aback as a missionary who had handed a cannibal chief a pork-chop and a Bible and then been told that he was going to be eaten himself after all.

The Memorandum demanded the occupation of the Sudeten-German districts by October 1st and the map attached indicated further districts which were to be annexed later after a plebiscite. It also demanded that all armed forces, frontier guards, customs officials, gendarmerie, and police should be evacuated before October 1st; that all military, commercial, and traffic establishments with all their material and equipment should be left in good order; that no foodstuffs, raw material, manufactured goods, or even cattle should be removed; that all Sudeten Germans serving in the Czechoslovak armed forces or police should be immediately discharged and sent to their homes; that all political prisoners of German race should be at once set free. Mr Chamberlain did not feel that the passionate desire of the British and French peoples to avoid war would be certain to support him if he accepted this 'Memorandum' even as a basis for future discussion. He parted from his host in the small hours of Saturday morning, September 24th, and went back to England later in the day. Mr Chamberlain had been sufficiently alarmed by Hitler's new demands to feel that he could not take the responsibility of trying to prevent the Czechoslovak Government's mobilization, and this was communicated in the late afternoon of September 23rd by the British and French Ministers in Prague.

Later in the evening Hitler's fresh demands were transmitted in detail. The members of the Syrový Government, the political Cabinet of Dr Hodža, and the chiefs of the Coalition parties met at the Castle at 8 P.M. The President, who was presiding in person, declared his conviction that war with Germany was now certain and that being so

he proposed a general mobilization of the Forces of the Republic, this proposal was accepted by the meeting, and at 10.30 P.M. the Prague Radio announced that the President of the Republic had ordered the mobilization of all classes up to the age of forty.

The effect was electric. A nation that seemed moribund with dejection sprang to life. Within a few hours the Government was able to declare that the Republic was ready for war. Within three or four days about twenty-nine Divisions with all military services, admirably trained, admirably equipped, and admirably armed answered the ravings of that disappointed maniac in Berlin who at the Sports Palace was revealing his own terror at the prospect of being forced to fight before he felt secure of victory. Besides that another half-million men were standing by, ready for the call to arms. Unfortunately there were no psychologists in the British Cabinet, and Lord Maugham's unawareness of this in his book *The Truth about the Munich Crisis*¹ is one of the objections which can be laid against it. As may be expected from any book which uses "The Truth" in its title, *The Truth about the Munich Crisis* is inaccurate in many minor details and presents a falsification of the main issue. If Lord Maugham had delivered such a summing up when he was on the Bench the plaintiffs would have won their appeal: the misdirection of the jury is flagrant.

One of the facts that Lord Maugham failed to grasp was that the German minority in Czechoslovakia contained within itself a very large minority which did not desire to go home to the Reich.

For instance, on September 27th eight German Deputies and Senators of the Communist Party published this declaration:

"We are expressing the desire of more than a million Sudeten-German democrats, Catholics, Socialists, and Communists, as well as several hundreds of thousands of the German followers of Henlein, when we solemnly declare that the majority of the Sudeten-German people refuses to be annexed to the Third Reich. We are absolutely at one with Czechoslovak democracy in our desire to defend the Republic, its democratic constitution and its territory against all armed aggression and against all blackmail. Henlein has no right to proclaim, in the name of the Sudeten-Germans his plan for the partition of Czechoslovakia. The Sudeten-Germans who voted for the Henlein Party did not vote for this plan, but for national equality within the framework of the Czechoslovak Republic."

The moment that Central Europe began to see signs, as it was believed, of a stronger attitude being taken by Great Britain and France

¹ Heinemann, 1944.

all over Yugoslavia there were demonstrations against the pro-German bias of the Stojadinović Government which had been fostered by the Prince Regent Paul in the interest of his own dynastic ambitions. Since then March 27th, 1940, has taught the world of what Yugoslavia is capable when the Government tries to override the will of the people. There were similar demonstrations in Rumania, and there was hope that the Rumanians would have agreed to the passage of Russian troops across their territory if it had come to that. On September 25th both Governments notified Hungary that in the event of her attacking Czechoslovakia they would at once fulfil their obligations. On September 25th the Soviet Government had informed the Polish Government that it would denounce the Soviet-Polish Pact of Non-Aggression if Polish troops continued to move towards the Czechoslovak frontier.

On September 21st Mr Winston Churchill had published the following declaration, which in one page disposes of every argument Lord Maugham uses in the course of his book:

"The partition of Czechoslovakia under pressure from England and France amounts to the complete surrender of the Western democracies to the Nazi threat of force.

"Such a collapse will bring peace or security neither to England nor to France. On the contrary, it will place those two nations in an ever weaker and even more dangerous situation.

"The mere neutralization of Czechoslovakia means the liberation of twenty-five German divisions, which will threaten the Western front; in addition to which, it will open up for the triumphant Nazis the road to the Black Sea.

"The acceptance of Herr Hitler's conditions constitutes the prostration of Europe before the force of the Nazis, who will gain very important advantages thereby. It is not Czechoslovakia alone which is menaced, but also the freedom and the democracy of all nations.

"The belief that security can be obtained by throwing a small nation to the wolves is a fatal illusion. The war potential of Germany will increase in a short time more rapidly than it will be possible for France and Great Britain to complete the measures necessary for their defence.

"If peace is to be preserved in a lasting way, it can be done only by a combination of the forces of all those whose convictions and vital interests dictate resistance to Nazi domination. A month ago that was still possible to achieve, but the chance was lost."

Mr Churchill had faced the issue fairly and squarely, which is what Mr Chamberlain was unable to do because he was blinded by a vision of attainable peace.

On September 24th the French Government ordered a partial mobilization, but the spirit of France was already much diluted by the water of Vichy. Yet we must beware of gibing at the French. We must remember that when General Gamelin crossed the Channel to find out what military aid he could count on from the British army he was told at the utmost two divisions. Moreover, the hesitation about mobilizing the British Fleet did not allay anxiety about British intentions. However, on the evening of September 26th the Foreign Office issued the following *communiqué* while Hitler was making his speech at the Sports Palace:

"It was authoritatively stated last night that during the last week Mr Chamberlain has tried with the German Chancellor to find a way of settling peacefully the Czechoslovak question. It is still possible to do so by negotiations.

"The German claim to the transfer of the Sudeten area has already been conceded by the French, British, and Czechoslovak Governments, but if in spite of all efforts made by the British Prime Minister a German attack is made upon Czechoslovakia, the immediate result must be that France will be bound to come to her assistance, and that Great Britain and Russia will certainly stand by France.

"It is still not too late to stop this great tragedy, and for the peoples of all nations to insist on settlement by free negotiation."

The *communiqué* was treated as a forgery by many of the French newspapers, for which fantastic attitude Bonnet was chiefly responsible. The depths to which the French politicians of the Right sank during those days before Munich had not been reached since the days of the Dreyfus case.

Over that week-end in London they were digging trenches in the parks, filling sandbags, and taking people's names and measurements for gas masks. Yet the Government still refrained from mobilizing the Fleet until midnight on September 27th and then only with extreme reluctance.

It was on September 26th that President Roosevelt addressed an appeal to President Beneš and Hitler:

"On behalf of the 130,000,000 people of the United States of America and for the sake of humanity everywhere I most earnestly appeal to you not to break off negotiations, looking to a peaceful, fair and constructive settlement of the question at issue. I earnestly repeat that so long as negotiations continue, differences may be reconciled. Once they are broken off, reason is banished and force produces no solution for the future good of humanity."

President Beneš replied at once:

"Although it is Czechoslovakia who has already made the greatest sacrifices in the negotiations up to the present time, sacrifices which touch the country's vital interests, we are not breaking off negotiations, being desirous of seeing the conflict solved by peaceful means of agreement.

"Czechoslovakia also signed a treaty of arbitration with Germany and has already proposed to settle the present dispute under its terms and is ready to renew this offer.

"I believe that even to-day the dispute could be settled in a spirit of equity, without resort to force, and the whole Czechoslovak nation still hopes this will be the case.

"The Czechoslovak nation would defend itself if attacked, but it is profoundly convinced, with you, that in the end war solves no problem and that this is a case in which reason, a sense of humanity, and the principle of justice should triumph."

Hitler's reply was a bombastic expression of his determination to go to war with Czechoslovakia unless she gave and did all he wanted. That reply lay far down on the long file which held humanity's mounting account against Hitler, but it was paid like the rest.

On Sunday, September 25th, the Czechoslovak Minister in London, M. Jan Masaryk, handed Mr Chamberlain and Lord Halifax the reply of the Sirový Government to the Godesberg Memorandum:

"My Government has now studied the document and the map. It is a *de facto* ultimatum of the sort usually presented to a vanquished nation and not a proposition to a sovereign State which has shown the greatest possible readiness to make sacrifices for the appeasement of Europe. Not the smallest trace of such readiness for sacrifices has as yet been manifested by Herr Hitler's Government. My Government is amazed at the contents of the memorandum. The proposals go far beyond what we agreed to in the so-called Anglo-French plan. They deprive us of every safeguard for our national existence. We are to yield up large proportions of our carefully prepared defences, and admit the German armies deep into our country before we have been able to organize it on the new basis or made any preparations for its defence. Our national and economic dependence would automatically disappear with the acceptance of Herr Hitler's plan. The whole process of moving the population is to be reduced to panic flight on the part of those who will not accept the German Nazi regime. They have to leave their homes without even the right to take their personal belongings or even, in the case of peasants, their cow.

"My Government wish me to declare in all solemnity that Herr Hitler's demands in their present form are absolutely and unconditionally unacceptable to my Government. Against these new and cruel demands, my Government feel bound to make their utmost resistance, and we shall do so, God helping. The nation of St Wenceslas, John Hus, and Thomas Masaryk will not be a nation of slaves.

"We rely upon the two Great Western democracies, whose wishes we have followed much against our own judgment, to stand by us in our hour of trial."

Mr Chamberlain who, as soon as he could obtain the agreement of M. Daladier, was proposing to make another appeal to Hitler suggested to M. Masaryk the possibility of an international conference or a German-Czechoslovak Conference in which a British representative would participate and asked him to ascertain his Government's opinion.

On September 26th M. Masaryk sent to Lord Halifax the reply he had received from Prague:

"The Czechoslovak Government would be ready to take part in an international conference where Germany and Czechoslovakia, among other nations, would be represented, to find a different method of settling the Sudeten-German question from that expounded in Herr Hitler's proposals, keeping in mind the possible reverting to the so-called Anglo-French plan. In the note which M. Masaryk delivered to Mr Chamberlain yesterday afternoon, mention was made of the fact that the Czechoslovak Government, having accepted the Anglo-French Note under the most severe duress, had no time to make any representations about its many unworkable features. The Czechoslovak Government presumes that, if a conference were to take place, this fact would not be overlooked by those taking part in it."

On September 26th Mr Chamberlain sent Sir Horace Wilson with a letter and a personal message to Hitler. Sir Horace Wilson had been Chief Industrial Adviser to the Government since 1930 and before that a permanent official at the Ministry of Labour. He was educated at the London School of Economics. Chamberlain had taken him both to Berchtesgaden and Godesberg. To Godesberg he had also taken Sir William Malkin, the Legal Adviser to the Foreign Office, obviously to advise about the method of effecting the transference of territory which had been apparently agreed upon at Berchtesgaden and forced upon the Czechoslovak Government by moral pressure. Why Sir Horace Wilson was chosen as Mr Chamberlain's companion would have baffled Œdipus or even Dr Joad to answer. Sir Horace saw Hitler about three hours before he was due to make his speech at the Sports

Palace. The medium was already working himself up for the disgusting performance he would shortly be giving in public, and Sir Horace Wilson and Sir Nevile Henderson, the British Ambassador, two orphans of the nerve-storm, left him, convinced that war was certain.

Excerpts from that vile speech have been given in the prologue, and how Mr Chamberlain and his entourage were able to persuade themselves that such a creature, compared with whom the Sausage-maker of Aristophanes was another Cicero, could be negotiated with will defeat the conjectures of posterity unless the mood of the British and French peoples at that time is understood. It cannot be asserted too emphatically that Chamberlain did feel convinced that he was the voice of the British people during those distressing two years before the war finally came; and it must be added with equal emphasis that he was not pandering to a mood in the way politicians will. He was expressing his own sincerest belief, and it was his happiness to feel sure that his beliefs were those of the majority of the British people.

On the morning after the speech Sir Horace Wilson saw Hitler again and gave him a warning from Mr Chamberlain that Great Britain would support France if her treaty obligations involved her in war with Germany. Hitler replied that, if he did not receive a satisfactory answer from the Czechoslovak Government by 2 P.M. on Wednesday, September 28th, he would proclaim a general mobilization and take military measures to get what he wanted. This information Sir Horace Wilson sent back to London in advance of himself. Meanwhile, at 12.30 A.M., the previous night Mr Chamberlain had issued the following statement:

"I have read the speech of the German Chancellor, and I appreciate his reference to the efforts I have made to save the peace.

"I cannot abandon these efforts, since it seems to me incredible that the peoples of Europe, who do not want war with one another, should be plunged into a bloody struggle over a question on which agreement has already been largely obtained.

"It is evident that the Chancellor has no faith that the promises made will be carried out. These promises were made, not to the German Government direct, but to the British and French Governments in the first instance. Speaking for the British Government, we regard ourselves as morally responsible for seeing that the promises are carried out fairly and fully and we are prepared to undertake that they shall be so carried out with all reasonable promptitude, provided that the German Government will agree to the settlement of terms and conditions of transfer by discussion and not by force.



PRESIDENT MASARYK AND DR. BENEŠ
Resting after a ride.



IN SEZIMOVO ÚSTÍ, SOUTH BOHEMIA
Mme and Dr Beneš at home.



DR. BENES
At Sezimovo Ústí in 1933.



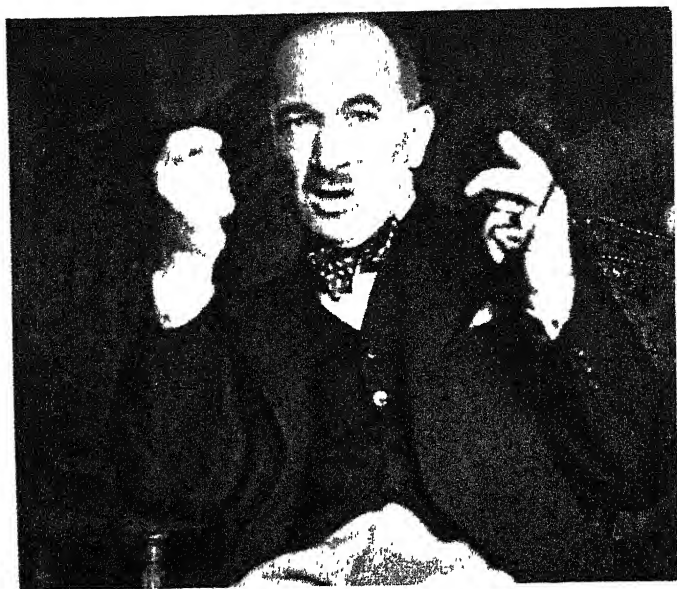
MME AND DR BENEŠ
A ski-ing holiday.



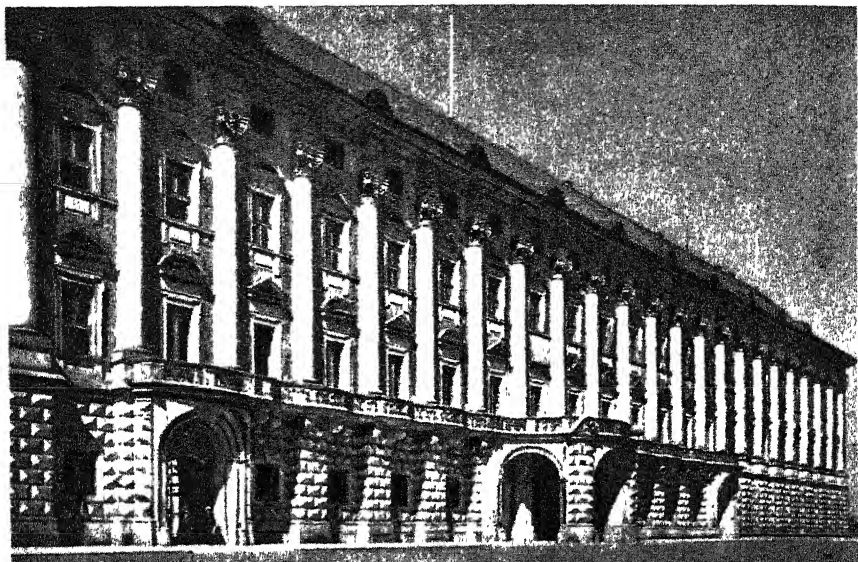
RECREATION
The President, Dr Beneš, playing tennis.



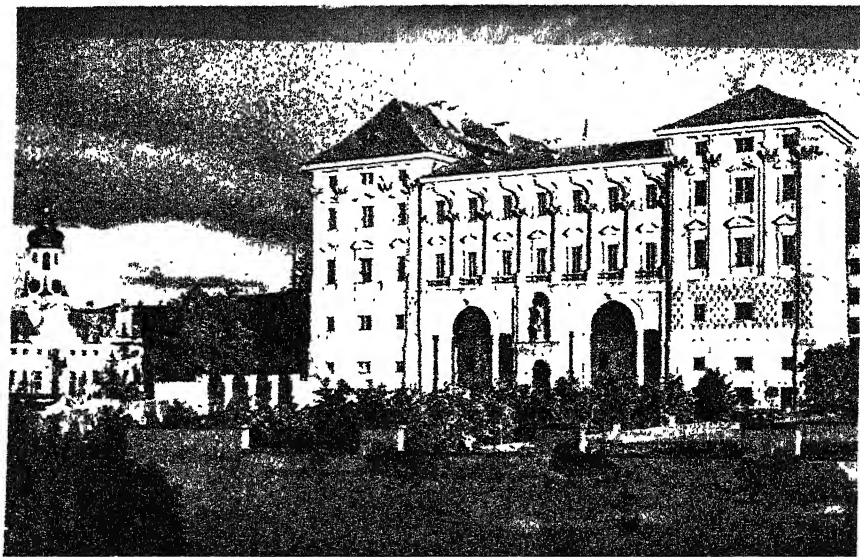
BY THE RIVER LUŽNICE.
Dr Beneš in Sezimovo Ústí.







THE CZERNIN PALACE IN PRAGUE
The home of the Czechoslovak Foreign Office.



THE CZERNIN PALACE
Garden front.

"I trust that the Chancellor will not reject this proposal, which is made in the same spirit of friendliness as that in which I was received in Germany and which, if it is accepted, will satisfy the German desire for the union of the Sudeten Germans with the Reich without the shedding of blood in any part of Europe."

That Chamberlain could have read that farrago of bombast, lies, and abuse from what sounded more like an alcohol-maddened whore than a man, and then express his gratitude for a kind reference to himself, marks the extent to which by now he was the victim of an obsession.

On securing Hitler's message from Sir Horace Wilson, Mr Chamberlain telegraphed to President Beneš:

"I feel it is my duty to inform you and the Czechoslovak Government that His Majesty's Government have received from Berlin information which makes it clear that the German army will receive orders to cross the Czechoslovak frontier immediately if by to-morrow (September 28th) at 2 P.M., the Czechoslovak Government has not accepted the German conditions. This means that Bohemia would be overrun by the German army, and nothing which another Power or Powers could do would be able to save your country and your people from such a fate. This remains true whatever the ultimate result of a world war might be. His Majesty's Government cannot assume the responsibility of advising you what you should do, but it believes that this information should be brought to your notice without delay."

That message was delivered to President Beneš, and soon afterwards at 9.30 P.M. on September 27th, Mr Newton called on Dr Krofta, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, with what now amounted to a meaningless telegram from London about the manner of carrying out the Anglo-French Plan. He then read out a telegram instructing the British Ambassador in Berlin to inform the German Government that since Herr Hitler demanded the cession of Sudeten territory by October 1st the British Government was urging the Czechs to act as quickly as possible. No wonder it was suspected in Prague that Munich was so much eyewash for an ignoble agreement which Chamberlain had already reached with Hitler at Godesberg. Mr Newton, with that graceful diplomacy which seems to have been his gift, went on to observe that if Herr Hitler had no confidence in President Beneš he would have to trust the British Government to see that the territory was punctually ceded.

Thereupon the so-called time-table was presented, so curiously like the Munich time-table that was finally adopted. It was in this document

that a detachment of the British Legion was mentioned as a suitable umpire for the transfer. That may have been comic. What was not comic was that Czechoslovakia was warned at the same time that whatever the result of a world war as a consequence of her obstinacy her own frontiers would never be restored. That is one of the less attractive items of the diplomatic sequence which Lord Maugham does not mention in *The Truth about Munich*.

The Czechoslovak Government accepted under duress most of the time-table but asked for an extension of the time of the final evacuation to be completed by December 15th. When the reply reached London the Munich conference had already been arranged. At 10.30 P.M. on the 27th Chamberlain received a letter from Hitler in which he argued that the military occupation of Bohemia was merely a security measure to guarantee that the Czechs would not procrastinate. Upon receipt of this Chamberlain sent off another letter to Hitler:

"I feel certain that you can get all essentials without war and without delay. I am ready to come to Berlin myself at once to discuss arrangements for transfer with you *and representatives of the Czech Government* [my italics], together with representatives of France and Italy, if you desire. . . . I cannot believe that you will take the responsibility of starting a world war which may end civilization for the sake of a few days' delay in settling this long-outstanding problem."

On top of this Chamberlain appealed to Mussolini, who had been bellowing round Italy for a week in support of Hitler. At Verona this gentleman had declared on September 26th:

"There is at this moment one man above all in Europe who must answer for what is happening, the President of the Czechoslovak Republic. He was the most obstinate, if not the greatest among those who disrupted the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. At that time he was already speaking about a Czech nation and writing about it . . . and was travelling everywhere, going even to Geneva. . . ."

Mr Chamberlain said it was his idea to appeal to Mussolini: M. Daladier said it was his. So did the ineffable Bonnet. Competition for the honour did not last long enough for the question to be settled. It is obvious that Mussolini in agreement with Hitler *proposed himself*, both to Paris and London, as the *deus ex machina*.

At eight o'clock on that Tuesday Chamberlain delivered his lugubrious and defeatist broadcast:

"How horrible, fantastic, incredible, it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing."

He said he would not hesitate "to pay even a third visit to Herr Hitler if he thought it would be of any use." He asked the public not to be alarmed if they heard of men being called up to man the anti-aircraft defences or ships. They were only precautionary measures such as a Government must take in a time like this.

The British and French Governments succeeded in frightening some of the people of London and Paris with gas-masks and sandbags and in frightening each other with their military unreadiness. It will not do to accuse Chamberlain of having set out to frighten the people of Britain when he knew there was no longer the slightest chance of war, but he had only himself to thank for the reaction that set in against him when public opinion had had time to recover from the nervous strain and recognize that the dictators had made an Aunt Sally of democracy.

At midnight of that September 27th, not before it was time, the mobilization of the British Fleet was ordered. During the night of September 27th-28th President Roosevelt sent a second and more urgent appeal for the continuation of negotiations and proposed that a conference of all the nations directly involved in the conflict should meet immediately in a neutral European region. The Paris Press liked the idea of Mussolini better; nor was London enthusiastic about Roosevelt's plan, which would mean having to invite Russia to take part in the discussions.

The news of the mobilization of the Fleet had more effect on Germany than anything else. The Germans were just as much in awe of the British Fleet as the British were of the German Army. The official German radio hurriedly contradicted the report that Germany was mobilizing. Hitler was getting worried. Several of his Generals, supported by Admiral Raeder, had been insisting that Germany was not ready for war.

However, he did not have to worry. On the morning of September 28th M. François-Poncet, the French Ambassador, called upon him with suggestions from the French Government for an arrangement which was to all intents and purposes the acceptance of the Godesberg demands.

This pusillanimous surrender beforehand was not told by Mr Chamberlain in the course of his report to the House of Commons on the international crisis. On that same day Mr Chamberlain had been relating his adventures with Hitler to an enthralled audience of M.P.'s and distinguished strangers and had just led them into the castle of the Giant Despair with the news that Signor Mussolini had secured

from Herr Hitler a postponement of war for twenty-four hours, but implied that that was the limit of the respite he could promise the country, when, hey presto, . . . just the way things happen in a story for tiny tots or on the last page of a Wild West serial when the rope is round the innocent victim's neck, in came a Foreign Office messenger who handed Sir John Simon on the Treasury Bench a note from Lord Halifax. Sir John Simon handed it to Mr Chamberlain, who read it and went right on with his speech in phrases that sounded curiously well-prepared:

"That is not all. I have something further to say to the House yet. I have now been informed by Herr Hitler that he invites me to meet him at Munich to-morrow morning. He has also invited Signor Mussolini and M. Daladier. Signor Mussolini has accepted, and I have no doubt M. Daladier will also accept. I need not say what my answer will be."

At this point one honourable member carried away by a spasm of deep religious emotion ejaculated: "Thank God for the Prime Minister."

"We are all patriots," Mr Chamberlain went on, "and there can be no honourable member of this House who did not feel his heart leap that the crisis has been once more postponed to give us once more an opportunity to try what reason and goodwill and discussion will do to settle a problem which is already within sight of settlement. I am sure that the House will be ready to release me now to go and see what I can make of this last effort."

The rabbit had been in the hat all the while, and as the conjuror held it up for the admiration of Parliament, "there followed a scene of enthusiasm which has probably never been equalled in the House of Commons," Lord Maugham records.¹ "Members rose in their places waving their order papers and cheering almost frantically for several minutes. The announcement clearly meant that settlement was in sight on the Berchtesgaden lines since those terms had already been agreed by the Czechoslovak Government. The relief and joy of the House was indescribable, and was voiced by the leaders of the Opposition, Mr Attlee and Sir A. Sinclair."

It would have been an unseemly scene in a Court of Justice; but Justice had vanished from the House of Commons that morning, and apparently the only honourable member who realized that she was gone was Mr Gallacher, the Communist Member for East Fife. He alone in that assembly had the courage to say that "while no one desired peace more than he himself and his party, it must be a peace based

¹ *The Truth about the Munich Crisis*, p. 50.

on freedom and democracy, and not upon the cutting-up of a State, and he would not be a party to what was going on."

Incidentally, that paragraph quoted from Lord Maugham's speech for the defence is a nice example of legal sophistry. The settlement was not in sight on the Berchtesgaden lines already agreed by the Czechoslovak Government. The settlement was in sight on the Godesberg lines, which the Czechoslovak Government had not agreed. Moreover, Mr Chamberlain had promised the Czechoslovak Government representation in any future conference. No Czechoslovak representatives were mentioned among the band of brothers whom that House of Commons had been cheering.

CHAPTER XIX

THE conference at Munich began on Thursday, September 29th, in the Nazi Brown House. There sat the four men who were about to sacrifice ceremoniously a small State for the benefit of the world. Two of those men believed as genuinely as Abraham that the sacrifice was worth making. One of them was a Birmingham Unitarian on the edge of the allotted span, with solid business interests and little knowledge of the larger world beyond the experience he had gained as a young man growing sisal in the Bahamas, with little knowledge either of human nature or of literature, who for the lubrication of the party machine had found himself Prime Minister of Great Britain in spite of the fact that he had not entered politics until he was fifty. True, he had had a great deal of municipal experience in his native city, but that was a handicap to the wide vision demanded of any statesman called upon to confront mundane problems in the fourth decade of the twentieth century. The other of those two sincere men was the son of a baker in a little provincial town, who had fought with distinction at Verdun, who had led the Radical Opposition to Poincaré's National Government, who was a strong Republican and anti-clerical, and who had been Prime Minister in 1933 and Prime Minister for a week in 1934, when he had come to grief for his strong-man methods during the February riots. After that he had spent over two years out of office jeered at by the Press as *le fusilleur*. In 1935 he had come back as one of the leaders of the Popular Front and had become Prime Minister again in April 1938.

Since that fatal February 6th, 1934, Édouard Daladier had lost any taste he may ever have had for being a strong man. He longed to be able to blot it from his record, and the achievement of peace for a France that was panting for peace overruled for him any other consideration. Thus he would never again be jeered at as *le fusilleur*. He was not happy about the proposed sacrifice of a small State. He did not like the idea of being head of the first Government to dishonour the signature of France in all her history. In this regard Neville Chamberlain was more fortunate: there was no British commitment. Therefore Daladier left the play to his partner. Somehow the fact that the English were taking the lead made the French part of the business less disgraceful. He wished he had the courage to remind the Englishman

that the small State they were going to cut up had been promised representation on equal terms. That last-minute appeal from Beneš that he should have consideration for Czechoslovak interests had been embarrassing, painfully embarrassing. In fact, he had not been able to bring himself to acknowledge it. He lacked the cynicism to say yes: he lacked the courage to say no. Mr Chamberlain had no such scruples. He had replied to the appeal of the President like a complacent schoolmaster. English self-righteousness was enviable at such a moment, M. Daladier may have reflected.

Mr Chamberlain's answer was handed to President Beneš by Mr Newton on the evening of September 29th, when the conference was already far advanced and when Mr Chamberlain had no more intention of showing consideration for Czechoslovak interests than for the backside of the moon.

Here it is:

"The remarks of the Czechoslovak Government to the proposed time-table were communicated to the Prime Minister, who will, of course, bear in mind the points for which the Czechoslovak Government have shown concern.

"Mr Chamberlain has already assured his Excellency the President of the Czechoslovak Republic that he will respect in Munich the interests of Czechoslovakia and that he goes there with the intention of trying to find an accommodation between the points of view of the German and Czechoslovak Governments, so that steps could be taken for an orderly and just application of the principle of cession to which the Czechoslovak Government has consented. His Majesty's Government wishes to express their firm hope that the Czechoslovak Government will not obstruct the already difficult task of the Prime Minister by the formulation of objections against the so-called time-table and by insistence on them. The Czechoslovak Government should bear in mind, as well as all the others concerned, the grave alternative if an agreement for a new settlement should not be found.

"It is absolutely necessary that the conversations at Munich should reach speedy and definite results, which would lead to direct negotiations between Germany and Czechoslovakia. This can be reached only if the Czechoslovak Government is resolved, at the present stage of negotiations, to give a wide discretion to Mr Chamberlain and not to hinder his decision by making absolute conditions."

It is clear from that message to President Beneš, even if it was drafted by Lord Halifax, that Mr Chamberlain was completely unaware of putting the slightest strain on Czechoslovak goodwill. He was like an

irritable surgeon who tells a patient not to fidget when he is probing with his knife. He was as little distressed by the spectacle of a small State gasping out its life as he would have been by the sight of a salmon safely gaffed.

By 1.30 A.M. in the small hours of September 29th-30th the conference over which Mr Chamberlain had told Hitler he was prepared to spend a week had made its award, which with one or two trifling ameliorations was a complete acceptance of the Godesberg Memorandum. The Czechoslovak delegates were called in to hear what had been decided. How this was done can be read in the report of Dr Hubert Masařík:

"At 3 P.M. on September 29th, 1938, our aeroplane took off from Ruzyň. After eighty minutes' flight, we landed at Munich. The reception we met with at the aerodrome was roughly that accorded to police suspects. We were taken in a police car, accompanied by members of the Gestapo, to the Hotel Regina, where the British Delegation was also staying. The Conference was already in progress, and it was difficult to establish any contact with leading members either of the British or French delegations. Nevertheless, I called out by telephone first M. Rochat and then Mr Ashton-Gwatkin. The latter told me he wished to speak to me immediately in the hotel.

"At 7 P.M. I had my first conversation with Mr Ashton-Gwatkin. He was nervous and very reserved. From certain cautious remarks, I gathered that a plan, the details of which Mr Gwatkin could not then give me, was already completed in its main outlines and that it was much harsher than the Anglo-French proposals. On our red map, I explained to him all our really vital interests. Mr Gwatkin showed a certain understanding in the question of the Moravian corridor, though he completely ignored all the other elements of the problem.

"According to him, the conference should end at latest to-morrow, Saturday. Up to now, only Czechoslovakia had been discussed. I drew Mr Gwatkin's attention to the consequences of such a plan from the internal political, economic and financial aspect. He answered that I did not seem to realize how difficult the situation was for the Western Powers or how awkward it was to negotiate with Hitler. On which Mr Gwatkin returned to the conference, promising that we should be called at the first interval.

"At 10 P.M. Mr Gwatkin took Dr Mastný and myself to Sir Horace Wilson. There, in the presence of Mr Gwatkin and at the express wish of Mr Chamberlain, Sir Horace told us the main lines of the new plan and handed us a map on which were marked the areas which

were to be occupied at once. To my objections, he replied twice with absolute formality that he had nothing to add to his statements. He paid no attention whatever to what we said concerning places and areas of the greatest importance to us. Finally, he returned to the conference and we remained alone with Mr Gwatkin. We did what we could to convince him of the necessity of revising the plan. His most important reply was that made to M. Mastný, to the effect that the British Delegation favoured the new German plan.

"When he again began to speak of the difficulties of negotiating with Hitler, I said that, in fact, everything depended on the firmness of the two Western Great Powers. To which Mr Gwatkin answered, in a very serious tone: 'If you do not accept, you will have to settle your affairs all alone with the Germans. Perhaps the French will put it more amicably, but I assure you that they share our views. They will dis-interest themselves. . . .'

"At 1.30 A.M. we were taken into the hall where the conference had been held. There were present Mr Neville Chamberlain, M. Daladier, Sir Horace Wilson, M. Léger, Mr Ashton-Gwatkin, Dr Mastný and myself. The atmosphere was oppressive; sentence was about to be passed. The French, obviously embarrassed, appeared to be aware of the consequences for French prestige. Mr Chamberlain, in a short introduction, referred to the agreement which had just been concluded and gave the text to Dr Mastný to read out. During the reading of the text, we asked the precise meaning of certain passages. Thus, for example, I asked M. Léger and Wilson to be so kind as to explain the words 'preponderantly German character' in Article 4. M. Léger, without mentioning a percentage, merely remarked that it was a question of majorities calculated according to the proposals we had already accepted. Mr Chamberlain also confirmed that there was no question except of applying a plan which we had already accepted. When we came to Article 6, I asked M. Léger whether we were to consider it as a clause assuring the protection of our vital interests as had been promised in the original proposals. M. Léger said 'Yes,' but that it was only possible to a very moderate degree, and that the question would come under the International Commission. Dr Mastný asked Mr Chamberlain whether the Czechoslovak member of the Commission would have the same right to vote as the other members, to which Mr Chamberlain agreed. In answer to the question whether international troops or British forces would be sent to the plebiscite areas, we were told that that was under consideration, but that Italian and Belgian troops might also participate.

"While M. Mastný was speaking with Mr Chamberlain about matters of perhaps secondary importance (Mr Chamberlain yawned without ceasing and with no show of embarrassment), I asked MM. Daladier and Léger whether they expected a declaration or answer to the agreement for our Government. M. Daladier, obviously embarrassed, did not reply. M. Léger replied that the four statesmen had not much time. He added positively that they no longer expected an answer from us; they regarded the plan as accepted and that our Government had that very day, at latest by 5 P.M., to send its representatives to Berlin to the meeting of the International Commission and finally that the Czechoslovak official whom we sent would have to be in Berlin on Saturday, in order to fix the details of the evacuation of the first zone. The atmosphere was becoming oppressive for every one present.

"It had been explained to us in a sufficiently brutal manner, and that by a Frenchman, that this was a sentence without right of appeal and without possibility of modification.

"Mr Chamberlain did not conceal his fatigue. After the text had been read, we were given a second slightly corrected map. We said 'good-bye' and left. The Czechoslovak Republic as fixed by the frontiers of 1918 had ceased to exist. In the hall I met Rochat, who asked me what the reactions would be at home. I replied curtly that I did not exclude the worst and that it was necessary to be prepared for the gravest eventualities."

Shortly after 5 A.M. on September 30th the German Chargé d'Affaires in Prague telegraphed a request for the Foreign Minister to receive him at six o'clock. He then handed him the text of the Munich agreement and notified him that the Czechoslovak representatives were expected to attend the International Commission sitting in Berlin at three o'clock that very afternoon.

At 9.30 A.M. in the President's Chancellery at the Hradčany there was a meeting of the political and military leaders of Czechoslovakia at which it was decided unanimously to accept the Munich Decree. While the meeting was still going on the British, French, and Italian Ministers had called on Dr Krofta to insist on knowing his Government's decision by noon. Half an hour after noon Dr Krofta received the three Ministers and told them:

"In the name of the President of the Republic and in the name of my Government, I announce that we accept the decisions taken at Munich without us and against us. Our view upon them will be expressed later in writing. For the moment I have nothing to add.

I want only to draw your attention to the necessity of persuading the German Government that the Press and radio campaign which has been conducted against us should now cease, for otherwise it will be impossible to carry out peacefully the programme laid down at Munich."

M. de Lacroix was able to convey M. Daladier's "keen regret," but Mr Newton could not do as much on behalf of Mr Chamberlain. He was merely authorized to assure the Czech Foreign Minister that the Prime Minister had done all he could. Signor Fransoni, the Italian Minister, held his tongue, and Dr Krofta brought the interview to an end with these words:

"I do not intend to criticize, but this is for us a disaster which we have not merited. We surrender, and shall endeavour to secure for our nation a peaceful existence. I do not know whether your countries will benefit by these decisions which have been made at Munich, but we are certainly not the last. After us, there are others who will be affected—and who will suffer from these decisions."

It sounds like a piece out of a speech in Thucydides.

To Mr Duff Cooper belongs the honour of resigning from the Admiralty amid the ovations with which Mr Chamberlain was welcomed home. It was a courageous action because at the moment it hardly won for him a word of commendation. Mr Eden's resignation from the Government earlier in the year over Mr Chamberlain's willingness to trust Mussolini had enhanced his popularity.

"During the last four weeks we have been drifting daily nearer to war with Germany," Mr Duff Cooper declared in his speech to the House after his resignation. "We never said until the last moment, and then in the most uncertain tone, that we were prepared to fight. We knew that information to the opposite effect was being poured into the ears of the head of the German State, and that he had been reassured and fortified in the opinion that in no event would Britain fight. . . . Throughout these days the Prime Minister has talked to Hitler in the language of sweet reasonableness, but he would have been more open to the language of the mailed fist. Mr Chamberlain returned from Berchtesgaden with proposals wrapped up in a cloak and called self-determination. They meant partition of a country, cession of territory. Sweet reasonableness has won nothing except terms which a cruel and revengeful enemy would have dictated to a beaten foe after a long war. . . . Crueller terms could hardly be devised than those of the Berchtesgaden ultimatum. I said to myself that if those terms were accepted it would be the end of all decency of conduct of public affairs in the world. . . . Having accepted partition, Czechoslovakia

should have been saved the humiliation of having to submit to the ignominy and horror of invasion. After Naboth had agreed to give up his vineyard he should have been allowed to pack up his goods. The German Government having got their man down, were not to be deprived of the pleasure of kicking him, or the German army of its loot. Britain was left with a tremendous commitment—to guarantee and defend a frontier that she had at the same time destroyed. It was as though we had dealt a man a mortal blow and at the same time insured his life.”

Mr Chamberlain in his reply tried to maintain that Munich was a great improvement on Godesberg. What he did not say was that 750,000 Czechs had now been handed over to the Reich without any opportunity of their case being heard. He added that they must all feel profound sympathy for a small and gallant nation in the hour of her national grief and loss, and somebody from the back benches of the Opposition—was it Aneurin Bevan?—called out, “It was an insult to say that!” By the time Parliament met again on November 8th the relief of having escaped immediate war was turning to more general criticism of Mr Chamberlain’s methods.

“Herr Hitler . . . proceeded to treat the concessions he had made at Munich as so much waste-paper, and took practically all that he had claimed at Godesberg, and even more.”¹

Daladier had certainly suffered a good deal at the conference, and when he saw the crowds at the Le Bourget aerodrome he wondered what his reception was going to be. When he found it was to be a welcome he cheered up. Perhaps henceforth he would not be called *le fusilleur*.

The shock to the Czechoslovaks of the surrender was shattering. After General Syrový’s Government had been reconstructed President Beneš resigned.

In a farewell broadcast at 9 P.M. on October 5th he said:

“With composure and with calm, we confront our fate. In these difficult times I have tried to safeguard the interests of our State and I have tried to do what is right for Europe in order to preserve the peace. We have now to reach an understanding with our neighbours. Their overpowering might has been too great for us. In order not to jeopardize the life of our State in the new circumstances, I think that as President I should no longer stand in the way. As a convinced democrat, I think it better to go. We remain democrats and we shall try to continue to work with our friends, but my resignation is impera-

¹ *Annual Register*, 1938.

tive in order to accommodate our State to the new circumstances. It is still necessary for us to be loyal to all our friends. Our new State will now receive a more homogeneous structure. There will be no more grounds for dispute between us and our neighbours.

"The men who did not appreciate the many attempts of the Government to reach an agreement with the neighbours of Czechoslovakia were mistaken. As I was elected in another situation, I fear that the personal representative so elected might be regarded as an obstacle to an agreement and to its necessary development. I shall remain a convinced democrat. We shall develop quietly and adapt ourselves to the circumstances. We shall not renounce our old friends and we must try to win new friends. Our State had a special nationalistic situation. Now it becomes a national State, corresponding to the development of the national principle. This new condition will awaken the activity of the nation and give it a larger moral foundation. The culture of our nation will become stronger. The top of the tree is cut off, but the trunk remains. Let us descend to the roots. Some time the tree will put forth new leaves.

"We are still numerous enough to look to the future with confidence. We have avoided a catastrophe and we must not lose our heads even in this hour of utter misery. We have not shown a lesser heroism in doing what we did than if we had gone into battle. After all these sacrifices, we are happy to see that we have retained as a nucleus for our State a nation which will understand how to safeguard its own interests.

"Your country was in danger, but the danger will be greater now if you forsake your unity. All of you—manual and mental workers, peasants and soldiers—work for the interests of our State, so that you may go forward to a happy future. I address my particular thanks to our courageous army. I remain with it in spirit and I wish it further success. I express my conviction that this people will preserve its confidence with energy and endurance, that it will continue to fight for national freedom, and that it will be as victorious in the future as it has been in the past.

"I do not leave the ship because the sea is stormy, but because it is a political necessity. I remain conscious of my duties as a citizen. For all our citizens I wish better times in the future, both for them and for our beautiful country. Good-bye to you. Remain united, brave, and faithful."

With the President's resignation, the State seemed to fall to pieces. The Sudeten Germans started pogroms. German democrats were beaten up. The whole bloody train of Nazi conquest was set in violent motion.

"Wenzel Jaksch, leader of the German Social-Democrat Party, crippled as he was, flew to London to beg visas for the more endangered of his followers, and came back with a load of sympathy and promises, but—at first—no visas. 'I called,' he said, 'on Lord Runciman and reminded him of how he had told me in Prague that he came as "the friend of all and the enemy of none."' "Now," I told him, "that you have proved your friendship for one side, the Henleinists, and secured them all they desired, we German democrats are in desperate peril and in need, too, of your friendship and succour from the danger of death and torture." Lord Runciman told me, "I believe that the Lord Mayor is opening a fund for you all, and if so, you will certainly find my name on the list of contributors." I picked up my hat and crutches and left.'"¹

In such an atmosphere Dr Beneš could not have remained President. The reactionary parties in the State would inevitably gain the upper hand, and there was no place for Beneš in such company. In any case, the German Government had made it clear that the continued presence of Beneš in Prague would increase their hostility.

After his resignation Dr Beneš and his wife retired to his country house, Sezimovo Ústí, near Tábor, but his friends were convinced that he was not safe in Czechoslovakia, and on October 15th his nephew Bohuš Beneš—son of Václav, who had boarded his young brother when he came to school in Prague—arrived from London to urge a speedy departure.

Here is what he wrote of that departure:²

"In London we felt great concern for Dr Edvard Beneš. The stories coming from Czechoslovakia and Germany were highly fantastic and the reports from the growing ranks of immigrants were not reassuring. We could not waste much time in planning our future action. Our telephone conversation with Prague was being tapped by Germany and by our own people; it was necessary to act without preliminary discussion of Dr Beneš's departure from Czechoslovakia. Consequently, I left London from the Croydon airfield on October 15th, 1938, and the same evening I alighted in the new post-Munich Czechoslovak Republic.

"On the way from Prague to Tábor, the taxi driver gave us his opinion of the calamity as it was being interpreted by the Czech people. He spoke of the tragedy, of the desertion of Czechoslovakia by the West, of the insatiable greed of Nazi imperialism, of the fatal lack of perception and political indifference of the rest of Europe, of all the factors which

¹ Quoted by G. E. R. Gedye in *Fallen Bastions*, p. 491 (Gollancz, 1939).

² Quoted by E. B. Hitchcock in *Beneš: the Man and the Statesman* (Hamilton, 1940).

made it impossible to intervene on behalf of the nation which was being crushed and destroyed. The people were suffering from a hurt like unto that of a watchdog which has been whipped unjustly for having guarded the security of Europe. The chauffeur knew for certain that the Czechoslovak people would never forget this.

"Preparations for Dr Beneš's departure took an entire week. We knew that Dr Beneš would not succumb to the superhuman exertion and exhausting work which he had experienced. We knew and he knew that the climax was yet to come. During that week we learned what the future programme would be. As was his custom, Dr Beneš turned to history in his judgment of the events of the last year—not to justify what had happened, for even then he had assumed his share of responsibility—but rather to project all the given conditions of the future development. All that had happened in Czechoslovakia up to that moment was the result of the decisions of all responsible government factors, working together in complete solidarity and harmony, with the full knowledge of the representatives of the governments, as well as the leaders of the various political parties and of the army. Dr Beneš was not concerned about these—there could be no question about them. The problems and arguments which were now arising in the Second Republic were concerned primarily with the natural moral decay of some groups, but had no great effect upon the situation as a whole.

"Dr Beneš saw in history and in the further evolution of European politics, a continuation of the programme which he was forced to surrender temporarily. He was convinced of one fact only—that the Czechs, Slovaks, and Carpatho-Russians could live in their own free state only within the framework of a free Europe. The crisis of 1938 was a world crisis and particularly a crisis of all Europe. He saw history repeating the years immediately preceding 1914. Dr Beneš saw that a war now would mean a war of a small nation, supported perhaps only by Russia and being destroyed by Germany, with France and England proceeding in a way similar to that taken during the Spanish conflict. Dr Beneš, a scientific as well as a practical statesman, sought a domestic safeguard for his nation. Had he remained, a political storm would have broken around him, both at home and abroad. He had to leave in order that the Czechoslovaks of all political camps could more readily come together. This man, who had never sought gratitude in politics, knew that many blamed him, many considered him ruined and that others feared him. He knew that when the nation recovered completely from the crisis of 1938, it would again have faith in him, who had worked with Masaryk and Štefánik in the formation of the First Republic.

"Our farewell to Prague and to Czechoslovakia was very brief and informal. We arrived in Prague on the night of October 22nd, without the capital knowing that its former president, Dr Edvard Beneš, was leaving for voluntary exile. On October 23rd a few old faithful friends accompanied him to the airport near Prague. Under ideal conditions, we flew over Essen at 3000 metres, while the Germans were unaware that Dr Beneš was fleeing. We made only a brief stop in Rotterdam and arrived safely in London. The freedom of the Czechoslovak nation of ten million people had flown with us."

When Dr Beneš and his wife reached their nephew's house in Putney he retired to bed for a fortnight's mental and physical rest. Then he got up and has been increasingly active and busy ever since.

No doubt his having a nephew in London was the factor which decided Dr Beneš to start his exile there, but it is also true that he did not feel a profound bitterness against England. His objective mind recognized that Great Britain had no obligations to keep Czechoslovakia intact beyond the obligations of common sense, and for the abandonment of that Great Britain herself would pay the penalty. The desertion of France struck a harder blow. It was upon France's honour that he had relied through all those wearing months. It was in the conviction that France would not renege that he had felt morally bound to go to the utmost limit in making concessions to the German demands because he knew that France feared war, and he loved France and always kept in his heart for France a warmth of gratitude, not only for what France had done to recreate his country, but personally for what she had given to himself from the moment he had arrived in Paris as a twenty-year-old student. He had no doubt now that France could not avoid war, and he feared for what must happen to France who had shown herself false to the spirit which has made her with Hellas the most beloved country of the human mind. It was no pleasure to him to reflect that France would pay for her pusillanimity. Revenge gives pleasure only to egotists, and Beneš is the least egotistical of men. Even when Hitler crashed it failed to give him any personal pleasure. He merely regarded it as an illustration of the law of moral gravity. He never supposed Hitler could avoid that ultimate crash, even when, an apparently broken and finished head of a broken and finished State, he was planning what he would do with a mended and revived State when the ineluctable crash came.

CHAPTER XX

DR BENEŠ imposed a rigorous silence upon himself during the four months that succeeded the Munich Dictate. The reaction against him in his own country was bitter. The humiliation of Czechoslovakia was ascribed to the collapse of a foreign policy of which he was the visible incarnation. He had never lacked enemies among the politicians at home, but now they turned upon him with hard facts instead of vicious fairy-tales.

The faults of those at home who had impeded measures which might have made it even more difficult for German propaganda to work up a credible case against the Czechs were forgotten. Beneš was to blame for everything by trusting to the honour of France and the common sense of Great Britain. The German wireless never let up on him. Beneš, and Beneš only, was responsible for the surrender. Without Beneš Czechoslovakia could have come to honourable terms with Germany. No slander about him was considered too trivial for the politicians to circulate. It would not be fair to say that by their attacks on Beneš at this time his enemies made the events of the Ides of March 1939 inevitable; but it can be said that by their attempt to discredit Beneš they were successful in convincing the British and French Governments that Beneš had misled them about the fundamental Czechoslovak attitude. The complacency of those two utterances by Mr Chamberlain and Sir Samuel Hoare on March 10th, 1939, presently to be noted can be explained only on the assumption that the proposed action by Hitler, five days hence, was known or at any rate suspected in advance and believed to be in accord with the desire of the Czechoslovak people.

The only alternative explanations are that the British Intelligence was in the hands of morons or that Mr Chamberlain and Sir Samuel Hoare were a pair of dunces.

Early in 1939 Dr Beneš accepted an invitation from the University of Chicago to give a series of lectures on Democracy. He had a natural desire to see the United States for himself, and he knew that American opinion was sympathetic. Chicago was the second most populous Czechoslovak city in the world. So much had been owed to Masaryk's visit to the United States during the war. For Beneš it was holy ground of democracy.

He and Mme Beneš reached New York on February 10th, and they were given a welcome which surprised him by its warmth. Mayor La Guardia, who could always be counted upon to madden the dictators either by a speech or a gesture, arranged a triumphal drive to City Hall. Dr Nicolas Murray Butler presided over a dinner and reception in honour of the visitors. On February 25th Dr Beneš started his work at the University of Chicago of which, like Masaryk thirty-five years earlier, he became a member of the faculty. His lectures were open to the public and were always crowded. His seminar was limited to fifty students picked from some hundreds of applicants. His method was to preside over his class as he had presided over so many committees of the League of Nations, and in his capacity of chairman to keep the discussion, the questions, and the answers to the matter in hand. As a professor he was a conspicuous success. It is the custom at the University of Chicago for the students to vote annually for "the most outstanding man of the year at the University." In June 1939 seven thousand of them nominated Professor Edvard Beneš for this distinction.

But Beneš, successful though he was in academic groves, was soon back in the dusty arena of politics.

The disintegration of what was now called Czecho-Slovakia, which had begun after Munich, continued steadily until it was finally completed. It had been forecast by Winston Churchill in the speech he had made on October 5th, 1938, during the Munich debate in the House of Commons:

"This is the consequence of five years of futile good intentions, five years of eager search for the line of least resistance, five years of uninterrupted retreat of British policy, five years of neglect of air defences.

"We have been reduced in those five years from a position of security so overwhelming and so unchallengeable that we never cared to think about it. We have been reduced from a position where the very word 'war' was considered one which would only be used by persons qualifying for a lunatic asylum.

"We have sustained a total and unmitigated defeat, and France has suffered even more than we have. . . . All is over. Silent, mournful, abandoned, broken, Czechoslovakia recedes into the darkness. . . . I venture to think that in future the Czechoslovak State cannot be maintained as an independent entity. I think you will find that in a period of time, which may be measured by years, but may be measured only by months, Czechoslovakia will be engulfed in the Nazi regime. . . .

"We are in the presence of a disaster of the first magnitude which has befallen Great Britain and France. Do not let us blind ourselves to that. It must now be accepted that all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will make the best terms they can with the triumphant Nazi Power. The system of alliances upon which France has relied for her safety has been swept away. . . .

"We have passed an awful milestone in our history, when the whole equilibrium of Europe has been deranged, and the terrible words have for the time being been pronounced against the Western Democracies: 'Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting.' "

It was a period of time lasting exactly five and a half months before Czechoslovakia was engulfed.

The method Hitler followed was to stir up trouble in Slovakia. A turbulent, treacherous, and short-sighted Catholic priest called Tiso, who had succeeded to the leadership of Father Hlinka's Party, not content with the autonomy snatched after Munich now demanded complete independence. With German support he became Premier of autonomous Slovakia in January 1939 and at once started to raise an army and carry on independent negotiations with Berlin. Beran, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, called him to order, and when he refused to obey dismissed him from the Premiership. Father Tiso thereupon rushed off to Berlin, where, on March 13th, he was received with honours. On the following day (March 14th) the Slovak Diet met in Bratislava, and after hearing a statement from Father Tiso, who had returned from Berlin, adopted a Declaration of Independence read by the Speaker, not without qualms. This servility was secured by a warning from Tiso that Hitler had vowed that Slovakia would immediately be partitioned by her neighbours if the declaration of independence were not made. As soon as it was secured Tiso telegraphed a request that Hitler would assume protection of the new Slovak State. Simultaneously, Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia declared its independence, to be immediately invaded by Hungarian forces, occupied, and incorporated in Hungary on March 16th.

The way was prepared for action in Bohemia and Moravia by turning on the German radio and filling the Press with fresh tales of atrocities by the Czechs against the persecuted Germans. In point of fact the stories were not fresh: they merely served out in March the very same stories which had been served out in September. They did not bother to vary the details of the lies. Dr Hácha, the aged and feeble judge who had been elected President after Dr Beneš resigned, was summoned to Berlin on the morning of March 14th. About eleven

o'clock that night, accompanied by Dr Chvalkovský, his Germanophile Foreign Minister, Hácha arrived in Berlin, where he was received with the honours due to the head of a State. The scene that followed gives an intimate view of Nazi diplomacy. There was a preliminary talk between Ribbentrop and Chvalkovský, after which the latter informed his President that there was nothing to be nervous about and that he would do well to ask Hitler for protection. It was already 1 A.M. when Hitler in the presence of Ribbentrop and Goering received the two Czechs. The fat boy had been specially fetched back from his Italian holiday to make their flesh creep with an account of what the Luftwaffe was proposing to do to Prague with 800 bombers if anything went wrong with the negotiations. Hácha tried to persuade Hitler that the Prague Government was eager to collaborate with him and was brusquely informed that Hitler had decided upon a military occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and that all that was required of Hácha was his signature to the document recognizing this and his perusal of the prepared memorandum which set out the future status of the Czech territories. Anybody who offered resistance would be destroyed. With this Hitler signed the document himself and left the room.

To quote from the report of M. Coulondre (March 15th, 1939), the French Ambassador in Berlin, in the French Yellow Book:

"Then there took place a tragic scene between the Czech Ministers and their three German interlocutors. For several hours Hácha and Chvalkovský protested against the violence which had been offered them. They announced that they would not sign the document . . . and that they would be cursed for ever by their people if they agreed to it. Hácha protested with all the energy at his command against the status of a Protectorate which was to be imposed upon Bohemia, and stressed the fact that no people of the white race had been placed in such a situation.

"The German Ministers were, however, unrelenting. They literally chased Hácha and Chvalkovský round the table on which the documents were laid out. They continually pushed these documents before them, and placed pens in their hands, and went on repeating that half Prague would be destroyed within two hours by German aeroplanes if they persisted in their refusal to sign. This, moreover, would be only the beginning. Hundreds of bombers were awaiting orders to start, and these orders would be given them at six o'clock in the morning if by that time the documents remained unsigned.

"President Hácha—a man of very advanced age, who was in a state of extreme physical depression—broke down and lost consciousness.

Goering's personal doctor intervened and revived him with injections. When the Czech President and Foreign Minister said that they could not make such a decision without the consent of the Prague Government they were told that there was a direct telephonic connexion with the Council of Ministers then in session in Prague, and that they could speak to them immediately. Actually this line had been installed in Czech territory by members of the German minority—without the knowledge of the authorities.

"At 5.30 A.M. Hácha—overcome, maintained only by injections, and with death in his soul—gave his consent."

In another account¹ it is stated that Hácha was received again by Hitler and that at 3.55 A.M. the following declaration was signed by Hitler, Hácha, Ribbentrop, and Chvalkovský:

"The Führer to-day in the presence of the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs, Herr von Ribbentrop, received the Czecho-Slovak President, Dr Hácha, and the Czecho-Slovak Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Chvalkovský, at their request in Berlin. At the meeting the serious situation which had arisen as a result of the events of the past week on what was hitherto Czecho-Slovak territory was closely and frankly examined. Both sides gave expression to their mutual conviction that the aim of all efforts in this part of Central Europe should be the safeguarding of calm, order and peace. The Czecho-Slovak President declared that in order to serve this purpose, and in order to secure final pacification, he placed the destiny of the Czech people and country with confidence in the hands of the Führer of the German Reich.

"The Führer accepted this declaration and expressed his determination to take the Czech people under the protection of the German Reich and to guarantee to it an autonomous development of its national life in accordance with its particular characteristics." ²

Shortly after nine o'clock the first German tanks began to rumble through Prague in a snowstorm. The population had been completely unaware that the Germans were likely to commit this outrage. There had been no disorders of any kind in the city, and the heavily censored Press had not hinted of further German demands. Some of the on-lookers broke down and wept; some abandoned themselves to impotent rage: some rushed shouting abuse at the German troops. The cup of

¹ Ripka, *Munich: Before and After*, p. 379.

² Later President Hácha was 'persuaded' by his Nazi masters to deny that he had been browbeaten into the surrender and to affirm that this note represented the true facts.

their mortification was filled when Hitler himself arrived towards evening and took up his quarters in the Castle, which he reached before the President himself got back from Berlin. He spent only one night in the dwelling-place of the old Kings of Bohemia, sleeping in a bedroom last slept in by King Carol of Rumania, and made a brief public appearance on a balcony to gratify a quantity of German children who had been rounded up to greet him.

From the first day of the German invasion quantities of food and material were seized and taken out of the country without even a pretence of compensation. Within a fortnight the German army was the better equipped by 48,000 machine guns (heavy and light); 1,500,000 rifles; 2500 guns of different calibres; 4,500,000 rounds of artillery ammunition; 600 tanks; and 1000 aeroplanes.

The gold reserves of the Czecho-Slovak National Bank, amounting to 18 million pounds sterling, were also seized.

The German Press proclaimed that "from now on Germany is again an Imperial Power, seeing that a foreign nationality had placed itself under German protection." So to mark this assumption of Imperial Power the Gestapo arrived, and the 'Aryan' Laws were promulgated, and Jews and Democrats were beaten up. It was as complete a victory as that Yahoo¹ nation had yet won.

On March 10th, when the German troops were already massing for the invasion, Sir Samuel Hoare, speaking at Chelsea, had declared that "there was now an opportunity to discover the road to peace, the greatest that had ever been offered to the leaders of the world, and he envisaged a co-operation between five men in Europe—the three dictators and the Prime Ministers of England and France—which might create a Utopia in Europe in an incredibly short space of time."

Thus do little boys build castles in Spain with mud-pies.

Mr Chamberlain, not to be outdone in optimism, published on the same day what ought to have been a superfluous statement "ostensibly from the Foreign Office but in reality from 10 Downing Street," that "the international outlook was quite serene and that there was no cause for anxiety."²

It did look as if Sir Samuel Hoare and Mr Chamberlain must have been aware of German plans and intended to appease public resent-

¹ By what I could discover, the Yahoos appear to be the most unteachable of all animals. . . . I am of opinion, this defect ariseth chiefly from a perverse, restive disposition. For they are cunning, malicious, treacherous and revengeful. They are strong and hardy, but of a cowardly spirit, and by consequence insolent, abject, and cruel.—SWIFT.

² *Annual Register*, 1939.

ment in advance. This suspicion seemed confirmed when, on March 16th, Mr Chamberlain and Lord Halifax made their reports on events in Czechoslovakia to Parliament.

They proceeded to "comment on Germany's action in a tone rather of sorrow than of anger. They were, they said, unable to regard it as other than inconsistent with the spirit of the Munich agreement. It was also in conflict with Herr Hitler's repeated statement that he desired to incorporate in the Reich only people of German race."¹

However, it would appear that "Czechoslovakia had disintegrated of its own accord, that the President had asked Germany to intervene, and that Herr Hitler had been graciously pleased to take the country under his protection and would respect its autonomy." That being the case the British Government regarded itself as "being definitely released from the guarantee which had been given to Czechoslovakia at Munich and which had never yet been properly defined." No more payments would be made out of the 10 million pounds' grant which had been voted to Czechoslovakia, of which so far only £3,250,000 had been withdrawn, and the visit to Berlin of the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of the Department of Overseas Trade would be postponed.

The indignation of the country clarified even Mr Chamberlain's turbid mind, and on the following day he made a speech at Birmingham which sounded as if at long last he had grasped that Hitler was not quite the idealist he had been willing to believe him. He apologized for his statement in the House of Commons and excused it on the grounds that the Government had not had time to digest the information, much less to form a considered opinion on it. A tortoise coming round the corner would have been too quick for Mr Chamberlain to be sure whether it was a tortoise or a tiger. He went on in his speech to ask in the accents of an old lady who has had her purse snatched by a footpad: "Is this a step in the direction of an attempt to dominate the world by force?" Mr Chamberlain concluded by declaring that even his love of peace might not be proof against a threat to British liberty and sat down amid the cheers of his Conservative audience who for some time had been growing sensitive over the accusation by the Left that they were licking Hitler's boots.

And so the mirage of Munich faded. There was even a hint of the British Government's desire to enter into consultations with the Soviet Union about the way to stop aggression; but the attempts were half-hearted, and as is now known in the end British approaches roused

¹ *Annual Register*, 1939.

so much suspicion of their loyalty in Russia that the Germans were able to offer what seemed to Stalin more serviceable terms.

On the day after the news of the latest German infamy Dr Beneš telegraphed his protest against it to President Roosevelt, Mr Chamberlain, M. Daladier, and M. Litvinov. He declared that the Czech and Slovak peoples had been the victims of a great international crime and that they would never accept "this unbearable imposition on their sacred rights." He then begged the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union to refuse to recognize the crime and "to assume the consequences which to-day's tragic situation in Europe and in the world urgently requires." He signed this appeal, "Edvard Beneš, Ex-President of Czechoslovakia, Professor at the University of Chicago."

On March 17th Beneš telegraphed to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations invoking "such articles as are involved, especially Article Ten" and appealing to the members to "do what their commitments under the League Covenant impose upon them."

It is a measure of the impotence into which the League of Nations had by now sunk that the final outrage upon Czechoslovakia was never formally brought before the Council.

On March 18th the University of Chicago put its radio at the service of Dr Beneš, and he broadcast to the American people:

"In this tragic moment of European history I am addressing this appeal to the American people.

"There is to-day in Central Europe a nation of Czechs and Slovaks whose territory has been violently invaded. Might has occupied a free country and subjugated a free people. A most brutal crime is perpetrated against this people. They have suddenly been robbed of everything they hold most dear and this crime has been committed as part of a carefully prepared programme—just as a common criminal plans for the robbery of an individual. The crime is committed within the framework of invasion by several hundred thousand soldiers, with hundreds of aeroplanes and tanks and military motor-cars. And this tragedy occurs—this invasion comes—in time of peace and without provocation or excuse. . . .

"Five months ago, during the so-called September crisis, the Czechoslovak nation was asked to make the sacrifice of territory, and pressure was put upon my people not to fight for their freedom, integrity and independence, in order to save the world from war. The appeal was made to that little people to sacrifice themselves for the peace of the world. That little people did it. And that little people

received the promise of the integrity of the remnant of its national territory and of the security of its national State. That little people, having made those sacrifices under pressure of the decisions at Munich, accepted because the four Great Powers at Munich signed an obligation to guarantee the new State . . .

"For twenty years I have worked for peace, for real peace. But to-day there is no peace in Europe. What is considered a state of peace is but a terrible illusion, an illusion which will one day take its toll in the enormous sacrifice of all the nations of the world. Because there is war already! Yes, there is war to-day in Europe; but there is war on one side only, and while one party makes war, the other can merely look on.

"And again I say to the world that everybody must understand that there will be no peace, there will be no respite, there will be no order until the crimes that have been committed in Europe are wiped out, until there is again respect for the given word, until the idea of honesty—personal honesty and State honesty—is re-established, until the principles of the individual and international liberty are secured, and until real courage takes command and requires that brute force must stop.

"Don't forget that it is not only Europe that is involved, not only Central, South, and Eastern European nations, the French nation, the British nation, the Scandinavian nations, the people of the United States, but the whole world that is in danger, not only from war, but from the destruction of every high concept of liberty, by the disintegration of every concept of honesty and decency. That is the danger to-day. A society which continues to tolerate such a state of things will be destroyed and will disappear.

"I place before the world court of public opinion these facts and in at last stating clearly what I mean and what I feel, I continue to be a believer in the ideals of liberty and in the simple concept of human honesty and dignity. I know that in the history of mankind brute force has always fallen after every such brutal and terrible misuse of power. The man who in modern history has been taken as a symbol of brute force, Napoleon, has declared: 'There are in the world two powers—the Sword and the Spirit. The Spirit has always vanquished the Sword.' In this statement I agree with the words of Napoleon.

"I declare that the independence of Czechoslovakia was not crushed; it continues, it lives, it exists. And I solemnly declare that those who have perpetrated this crime against the Czechoslovak nation and against all mankind are guilty before God and will be punished.

"During the last months, and especially in the period that preceded and followed the September crisis, I have many times been attacked personally. I have never answered. I never shall answer. But until my last breath I shall continue to fight for the freedom of my people and for their rights, and I am sure that my nation will emerge from this struggle as it has done many times before in its history, as brave and as proud as she has been throughout the past, and having always with her the sympathy and the recognition and the love of all decent people in the world. And there is no more fitting place for me to make this declaration than in this free country of Washington and Lincoln.

"So I must end with an appeal to the American people. I would beg that they do not permit such conceptions and ideas as are now trying to dominate Europe to be tolerated in this free country. Because in the approaching battle for the victory of the Spirit against the Sword, the United States has a very great role to play. Be ready for that fight and be strong—O people of Democracy!

"To all right-thinking men and women everywhere I give the motto of my beloved nation—"Truth prevails."

The British Government, the French Government, and the Soviet Government refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new situation created in Czechoslovakia by the action of the Reich. And finally on March 21st the United States Government declared in a note to the German Minister in Washington:

"The Government of the United States has observed that the provinces referred to are now under the *de facto* administration of the German authorities. The Government of the United States does not recognize that any legal basis exists for the status so indicated.

"The views of the Government with regard to the situation above referred to, as well as with regard to the related facts, were made known on March 17th. I enclose herewith for the information of your Government a copy of the statement in which these views were expressed."

This statement had been made by Mr Sumner Welles and declared:

"This Government, founded upon and dedicated to the principles of human liberty and of democracy, cannot refrain from making known this country's condemnation of the acts which have resulted in the temporary extinguishment of a free and independent people. . . ."

On March 18th the Treasury imposed 25 per cent. penalty dues on subsidized German imports. On March 20th President Roosevelt recalled the American Ambassador from Germany and the American Minister from Prague. American opinion was behind him, and the isolationism which had been the American expression of the disastrous

fainéant mood that caused Munich was temporarily in eclipse. The President took advantage of it to press for a revision of the Neutrality Act, and on April 15th he invited Hitler to give assurance that his armed forces would not attack or invade the territories or possessions of thirty-one States he proceeded to name.

Hitler made great play with this appeal in an impudent speech before the Reichstag, and it is not too much to say that with that speech he signed the death-warrant of the Third Reich.

Dr Beneš and Mr Jan Masaryk, who was also in the United States, addressed meetings all over the country. Dr Beneš was reaping the reward for the self-restraint which had kept him silent all these months amid the calumnies and reproaches of so many of his fellow-countrymen. He became the leader of his people by natural right: he was recognized as the voice of free Czechoslovakia. At a great meeting of Czechoslovak sympathizers convened by the Czech National Alliance in Pilsen Park Avenue, Chicago, Jan Masaryk read the first public utterance of Dr Beneš to his American countrymen. In it he called upon free Czechs and Slovaks all over the world to unite in a brotherhood of blood and prepare for their nation's freedom in a free Europe. At the American Czechoslovak Conference held April 18th-20th representatives of the three groups—the Czech National Alliance, the Alliance of Czech Catholics, and the Slovak National Alliance—invited Dr Beneš to accept the leadership of the unified cause, and thus all Czechoslovak organizations merged themselves in the revived Czechoslovak National Council. This time it was Dr Beneš who took the place of T. G. Masaryk as leader.

Several universities offered Dr Beneš honorary degrees, which gave him fresh opportunities of speaking for democracy. On the Columbia campus 20,000 people rose from their seats and stood throughout the ceremony as a tribute to that indomitable little man—the only occasion on which such a tribute has been paid by such an audience at Columbia University.

Dr Butler, the President, introduced Dr Beneš with these words before he capped him:

“Edvard Beneš, at one time President of the Czechoslovak Republic; economist, diplomat, statesman; Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government of his fatherland at the age of thirty-four, labouring with vision, sagacity, and courage to rebuild his broken country and to make it a welcome member of an organized family of prosperous and peaceful nations; reflecting most effectively in this twentieth century the democratic ideals and hopes of Hamilton and Jefferson; checked, but

not defeated, by the forces of tyranny and unreason in guiding the life of a great nation—for the greatness of a nation as Victor Hugo said long ago is not affected by the number of its inhabitants any more than an individual is measured by his height, for whoever presents a great example is great.”

In July 1939 Dr Beneš and Mme Beneš left the United States to take up their residence in a small house at Putney, near his nephew Bohuš. In a house opposite workers were soon busy on the organization of the Czechoslovak cause.

On October 13th, 1939, Dr Osuský, the Czechoslovak Minister in Paris, notified the French Prime Minister of the institution of the Czechoslovak National Committee. In his reply of November 14th M. Daladier recognized that this Committee “is qualified to represent the Czechoslovak people and in particular to execute the Agreement of 2nd October regarding the reconstitution of the Czechoslovak army.” On December 20th Dr Beneš notified Lord Halifax to the same purport, and in his reply of the same day Lord Halifax accorded His Majesty’s Government’s recognition. When Dr Beneš received Lord Halifax’s reply his mind must have gone back to August 1918, to that triumphant moment when Mr Balfour accorded His Majesty’s Government’s recognition to the Czechoslovak National Council as the trustee of the future Czechoslovak Government.

On July 21st, 1940, the Provisional Czechoslovak Government was recognized by His Majesty’s Government. On July 18th, 1941, Great Britain accorded full recognition of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic and of the Czechoslovak Government, and the King accredited to the President of the Czechoslovak Republic his Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary. On the same day the Czechoslovak Republic entered into alliance with Russia, and steps were taken to form a Czechoslovak army on Russian soil.

On December 16th, 1941, the Czechoslovak Government declared itself in a state of war with all the enemies of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

On January 23rd, 1942, the joint Czechoslovak-Polish Committee signed a declaration by which both Governments expressed their determination to prepare for the future a basis for a common policy between the two countries in regard to foreign affairs, defence, economic and financial matters, social questions, posts and telegraphs, and transport.

It was hoped that such a Confederation would form the nucleus for a larger Union embracing other States with which the interests of

Czechoslovakia and Poland were linked, and both Governments expressed their satisfaction at the Greek-Yugoslav Agreement which had just been concluded and their belief that security in the area between the Baltic and the Ægean depended primarily on the collaboration of the two Confederations.

Unfortunately, the fancy that such a Confederation was being encouraged by Great Britain and the United States with the object of creating a *cordon sanitaire* against Communism antagonized the Russians, and Dr Beneš, who had always realized the impossibility of counteracting effectively the German *Drang nach Osten* without the wholehearted aid of Russia, preoccupied himself with the necessity of reaching a clear-cut agreement with the Soviet Union. This was finally achieved when he arrived in Moscow on December 11th, 1943, to sign a Treaty of Friendship, Collaboration, and Mutual Assistance between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. It is a realistic document, the realism of which owed much to the hard facts of war.

Clause three says:

"Confirming their pre-war policies of peace and mutual assistance expressed in the Agreement signed at Prague on May 16th, 1935, the High Contracting Parties undertake, in the event of one of them finding itself involved during the post-war period in a war with Germany, should the latter revive her *Drang nach Osten*, or with any one State which should unite itself with Germany either directly or indirectly in the waging of such a war, the other High Contracting Party shall bring the one which may become so involved all military and other aid within its power."

Clause four says:

"The High Contracting Parties, taking into account their respective interests concerning security, have agreed upon close friendly co-operation during the period after the re-establishment of peace, upon action which will conform to the principle of mutual respect for each other's independence and sovereignty, and upon non-interference in the internal affairs of each other. They shall develop their economic relations on the largest possible scale, and render each other every economic assistance after the war."

A protocol to the Agreement says:

"The U.S.S.R. and the Czechoslovak Republic agree that in the event of any Third State which has common frontiers with the U.S.S.R. or with the Czechoslovak Republic, and which in the present war has been the object of German aggression, desiring to become a party to this Agreement such State shall be given the opportunity with the

sanction of the U.S.S.R. and the Czechoslovak Republic of signing this Agreement which thereby would acquire the quality of a tripartite agreement."

The third State understood is Poland, and Dr Beneš has lived to see all difficulties between Poland and Russia removed. He must regard anything he has done to bring about this happy state of affairs as one of the major achievements of his life.

Dr Beneš's point of view about relations with the Soviet Union was well expressed in his comment on the treaty between Great Britain and the Soviet Union of May 26th, 1942:

"I consider the British-Soviet treaty, supplemented by Molotov's conversations with President Roosevelt, as one of the most important political and military facts of the present war. It is the final diplomatic step, which has definitely ensured our ultimate victory.

"For a full twenty years the Czechoslovak Republic has followed and welcomed a policy of co-operation between the Soviet Union and Western Europe. I myself personally have always been convinced that without such collaboration, and particularly without British-Soviet collaboration, European equilibrium cannot be ensured, and that without it, it will not be possible to establish a condition of enduring peace on the European Continent.

"On behalf of my own country, I should like to express my deepest satisfaction regarding the treaty, and it is with great pleasure that I offer my congratulations to all those who were concerned with drawing it up. The guarantee that this co-operation will continue after the war and will preserve peace against all aggressors, shall this be called for, for twenty years after the war will be a great inspiration to all the enslaved peoples, and will heighten their resolution in their struggle against Nazism to an unprecedented degree.

"The consequences of this treaty will be far-reaching not only in respect to the war, but to the period of peace and reconstruction by which it will be followed. I hope that the other Allied Nations concerned will without difficulty find their way to collaborate with the two Powers who are parties to the treaty, and this is the spirit indicated in the treaty itself. I am convinced that the whole of the Czechoslovak nation at home shares the sentiments which I am here expressing and that both for them and for their fight, particularly in the period of terrible suffering through which they are now passing, what has been achieved will provide an enormous encouragement."

Another important journey was made by Dr Beneš in 1943, when he paid official visits to the United States and Canada between May

12th and June 10th. It was important to demonstrate to the people in Czechoslovakia under the Germans and Hungarians that the Czechoslovak Government in exile enjoyed the full confidence of the United States. Dr Beneš received a warm welcome, and the Czechoslovak Legation in Washington, which had never ceased to function, was raised to the rank of an Embassy. Furthermore, Dr Beneš was invited to speak at a joint session of both Houses of Congress, and this honour was also paid him in Ottawa, where he addressed the members of both Houses of the Canadian Parliament.

The Czechoslovak Legation in London had been raised to the status of an Embassy in the summer of 1942, shortly before the publication of a White Paper by the British Government on August 5th which confirmed the understanding already given to Dr Beneš by Mr Winston Churchill on November 11th, 1940, that in the post-war settlement Great Britain would not be bound by any arrangements made at Munich in 1938 regarding the frontiers of Czechoslovakia. With a nice sense of dramatic emphasis on September 29th, 1942, General de Gaulle, the President of the French Committee of National Liberation, had addressed a letter to Mgr Šrámek, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, informing him that the French National Committee "repudiating the arrangements signed at Munich on September 29th, 1938, solemnly proclaims that it considers these arrangements null and void as well as all action taken to implement such arrangements or as a result of them." And the letter goes on to pledge the word of the French National Committee to do everything in its power to support the restitution to the Czechoslovak Republic of all the territories included in it before Munich. The French Note is more generous than the British in that it is more positive, but on the other hand France violated her word in consenting to the Munich Dictate and Great Britain did not. France lost honour; Great Britain lost respect; both countries lost their heads.

It is typical of Dr Beneš that in a matter like the punishment of war criminals which lent itself to nebulous expressions of intention and unprecise definition he was determined that the Czechoslovak view shall be crystal clear. Here, for instance, is a resolution passed by the Czechoslovak Government under his chairmanship on June 17th, 1942, after the obliteration of the village of Lidice:

"For all the German crimes committed on Czechoslovak territory or against Czechoslovak citizens there are personally answerable all those who have committed, instigated, helped, shared in, or supported them.

"Personally responsible are, in particular:

"1. Adolf Hitler and the members of his Government.

"2. All the representatives of the German Government and Administration and their comrades down to Neurath, Bertsch, and Daluge, and all the German officials and military representatives in our country, such as Oberlandräte, Landräte, commanders, superior officials, and all the members of the German administrative, police, judicial, and military apparatus, including the Gestapo, the S.S. and S.A. detachments and all other German military and police formations.

"3. All other Germans who have aided the culprits, even though only indirectly, or by approval of their conduct.

"Similarly there are answerable all the local traitors who from the first German acts of violence against the Czechoslovak Republic committed offences against the State, or against people or citizens who remained loyal to the State. When Czechoslovak freedom is restored those who engaged in hostile intrigues against it or voluntarily helped the enemy shall receive just retributions.

"The Czechoslovak Government will not cease in the endeavour to cause justice to be done, until those guilty, all of them, whether caught in our own territory or sought out on foreign territory, receive punishment. In the spirit of the declaration of the Allied Governments in St James's Palace on January 13th, 1942, it expresses the conviction that the culprits will after this war not find asylum in any country and will not escape well deserved punishment. The Czechoslovak Government will itself also prepare and arrange everything necessary in order that courts set up for this purpose shall immediately, after the liberation of the country from enemy occupation, judge and punish the culprits with extraordinary and the most severe sentences.

"The Government assigns to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Justice, the task of carrying out without delay everything for the early execution of this measure."

Note that word 'extraordinary.' Such an adjective claims the power to make the punishment fit the crime. That power is not likely to be abused by the Czechoslovaks; but it certainly provides for the possibility of having to expel from the soil of Czechoslovakia any citizen of whatever race who has failed in his duty to the State. The Germans, who have moved other people about Europe as they would move cattle, have called down upon themselves like treatment. The Sudeten Germans will receive better treatment. They will go home to the Reich, and stay there.

Those German democrats who were loyal to the State in which they preferred to live will no doubt be allowed to remain in it.

There must be no confusion between the demand at the end of the First World War to hang the Kaiser and the demand in 1945 that justice should be done to Adolf Hitler and his Government. It was impossible to fasten the responsibility of the First World War on the Kaiser and equally impossible to fasten upon him the responsibility for the brutal methods by which the Germans conducted it. Hitler was never fit to be treated as an equal by European statesmen, and the failure to recognize this was the cause of the tragedy whose final act was dragging itself out as these words were penned. Lord Baldwin in the Lords debate on Munich protested against the suggestion that there was "something unclean in having to face discussions with a dictator," but there *was* something unclean in a discussion with Hitler, and after the panic hysteria had passed the people of Britain realized this, and for that reason they turned against Chamberlain, who they felt had involved them all in his humiliation. It was unjust because they by their first approbation of what he had done had involved themselves in the defilement. That defilement has been washed out by blood and tears and sweat.

It will be remembered that when Dr Beneš first came to London as a young student he was shocked by the great city at first and disillusioned by the English attitude towards life. Then he looked beneath the surface and recognized the basic moral strength of a great people. After what he endured during those months that culminated in the Munich Dictate he could never have faced England as a shattered man unless he had known that he could draw upon that basic moral strength for his own revivification. Apart from the six months he spent with such honour in the United States and visits to America and Russia during the war, he spent the whole of his exile from his native country in England. It was a period of nearly seven years, to March 1945. He was in England at the outbreak of war. He was in England during those tremendous months after the fall of France. Czechoslovak pilots took part in the Battle of Britain. Czechoslovak troops were standing by to guard a fragment of this island. They were all that was left of that magnificent army he had done so much to build up and which had been sacrificed to a phantasm of peace; but he was as proud of these devoted sons of Czechoslovakia as he was of their devoted fathers who in the First World War fought with the Lion of the Argonne at Vouziers and on the high frontiers of the Alps against the Austrian. He was in England on that long June day when Hitler turned on Stalin—it could

not be too long a day for him because for him each hour of it was bright with the assurance of victory. He had always been positive that Germany would turn on Russia soon or late, and when she did turn he had the elation of knowing that she had turned to her own destruction.

The way the people of Britain acknowledged the grandeur of the struggle that the Soviet troops fought was a joy to him, because in that acknowledgment he saw with his usual optimism an end at last of the years of mutual misunderstanding and suspicion between the West and the East which had retarded and complicated the progress of Europe towards the democracy to which his life was dedicated and to the furtherance of which Masaryk and he had planned to devote the country they had hatched like a phoenix from the ashes of a burned-out Empire.

In the year 1458 the Diet of Bohemia elected as King a Czech noble, George of Poděbrady, which upset Pope Pius II and the Emperor Frederick III because George had no hereditary or royal claim and was, moreover, a Hussite. Nevertheless, the Emperor, who had his own troubles, found it convenient to accept the election and invest George with the royal insignia. At that date the lands of the Bohemian Crown stretched to within a few miles of Berlin. This is not the occasion to relate the dramatic events of George's reign of thirty years or to examine the tortuous and subtle character of George himself; but what possesses a lively interest for to-day is that in his struggle with Papal opposition he conceived, as a counterpoise to the political power of the Holy See and its claim to concentrate European resistance to the westward progress of the victorious Turk round the leadership of the Pope, a League of Christian Princes for the preservation of peace in Europe. France, Burgundy, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, and Venice were to join in putting the Holy See politically in its place. There was to be a General Council for the reform of the Papacy and the Empire, and the King of France was to be the 'President' of the League. That side of the League was merely a device of political expediency; there was a more idealistic conception besides. The members of the League were to renounce their right to wage war independently, and that right was to be transferred to the League. War between members was to be prohibited absolutely; internal disputes were to be settled by the League as a united body. The League was to protect its members against aggression by States who were not members. If a dispute arose between a member of the League and a non-member the League was to send envoys in an effort to secure a settlement; but if this diplomatic intervention failed the League was pledged to bring the whole of its

power to bear against the non-member State in defence of the member State. Beyond this the League, in the interest of European peace, was prepared to intervene in disputes between non-members whether it was invited or not, and if the dispute could not be settled it was pledged to intervene in the war on the side of the State which was willing to submit to its decision and abandon hostilities.

If the League of Nations conceived by President Wilson was demonstrated to be an ideal in advance of its time how much more impracticable and premature was the Czech King's League of Christian Princes five centuries ago. It is significant, however, that the idea of such a league came from Bohemia, because it is in Bohemia more than anywhere else in Europe that the contending aims of races, the acquisitiveness of rival States, and the strife of creeds have always been rampant.

Bohemia is, in fact, the heart of Europe, and it was the failure of the fatigued statesmen of Great Britain and France to comprehend this fact which took them into the Brown House in Munich and led them out again to make the Second World War a certainty.

If Czechoslovakia was a French outwork designed to impede the German advance it was equally a Russian outwork, a Polish outwork, and a Balkan outwork. It was the main dam against the German flood. Nobody was better aware of this than Dr Beneš. Nobody worked so hard as he in the interval between the two wars to strengthen the authority and increase the power of the League of Nations. The emotional contribution which Neville Chamberlain made to peace was a mere week's exertion compared with the mental and moral contribution over twenty years of that indefatigable little man with his ear to the beating heart of Europe. Chamberlain thought that Czechoslovakia was a far-away country about which he and his British listeners knew nothing: the feet of a man might as well call his heart a far-away organ of which they know nothing and presume that an acute cardiac disorder would allow them to go pottering along upon their own business.

Beneš never preached the threat of war. When the Geneva Protocol of 1924 was discarded by Austen Chamberlain for the sake of Locarno, which the wily Stresemann forced upon him from the diplomatic pack, Beneš took a hand in the friendly game and strove his utmost to make the best of the Locarno Treaties. Perhaps he allowed himself to be deceived by Stresemann's advice to the Sudeten deputies to take an active part in the Czechoslovak Government into believing that there was a genuine intention by Germany to accept Czechoslovakia as a

European necessity. Certainly he never cast a doubt in any public utterance upon the pacific efficacy of Locarno. Nevertheless, this man of peace did not hesitate when he was elected President to take advantage of his authority as commander-in-chief to perform something like a miracle of military equipment and organization in the bare three years at his disposal. He may have given Stresemann the benefit of the doubt: he was not prepared to extend as much charitable credulity to Hitler.

And let it be remembered by every nation which has spent its blood and treasure in destroying the menace to human evolution that has been offered by this latest and most monstrous exhibition of a nation which must be accounted either evil or mad or both that the man Hitler recognized as his worst enemy was Beneš. Let it be remembered equally by the people of Czechoslovakia. Beneš sacrificed himself to prove to the world that Germany could not be appeased. If he was wrong he knew that he must fade for ever from the public scene and that his voice must become as mute for the remainder of his life as the voice of George of Podbřady had been for five centuries. That Beneš knew when he wrestled with the Ministers of Great Britain and France in the small hours of that September night in 1938.

The irrational in Hitler recognized the rational in Beneš as a quality which must finally thwart him unless he could present Beneš as the lie, himself as the truth. Roosevelt he has mocked as a cripple; Churchill he has reviled as a drunkard; Stalin he has cursed as a traitor. The only man that the most evil liar in recorded history has publicly called a liar is Beneš. That is the supreme testimony to Beneš as the voice of truth. *Pravda vítězí*. Truth will prevail.

CONVERSATIONS

My first meeting with President Beneš was conventional enough: it could hardly have been otherwise, for it was merely intended to give him an opportunity to decide whether he would agree to be made the subject of a book. On such an occasion the writer is in much the same position as a painter who comes to discuss a portrait with his sitter. The practical details to be settled seem to raise a barrier which suggests that ease of intercourse is unlikely ever to be attained. I had been warned beforehand by M. Jan Masaryk that the President was not expansive about himself, could not, indeed, be expansive because such expansiveness violated his fundamental character. That did not mean he would decline to talk about his political ideas, actions, and motives. He was likely to be discursive enough on all three, but that discursiveness would not tell a biographer more than the newspaper correspondents of twenty years had been told.

That first meeting took place at the Czechoslovak Embassy in Grosvenor Place in July 1943. Dr Beneš seemed preoccupied with a kind of exasperation. It was the only occasion I ever heard him speak with the slightest bitterness about Munich, the only time I ever detected in him the faintest sign of self-pity. In none of the talks I enjoyed with him through the spring of 1944 was that note heard again. Just before we parted on that hot July day of the first meeting he said to me:

"I have just had news from the best source of information we have in Berlin that three days ago the German General Staff had a meeting with Hitler at which Hitler was told that the present line on the Eastern Front would not be held beyond next January. So I think in a very short time now we shall see that the Germans will shorten that line. They begin to be finished."

And sure enough a week or two later the Germans started to pull in that wide-flung line.

The explanation of the President's mood that day came to me when I heard that he was worried because the Foreign Office was still making difficulties about his proposed visit to Moscow to sign a treaty with Soviet Russia. I divined that the news he had received from Berlin had put him into a momentary fret of impatience because he did not want the Russians to suppose he was postponing the Moscow

visit until any possible doubt about the ultimate issue of the vast struggle had vanished; and by the hesitation of the Foreign Office he was being reminded of those summer days in 1938 when the diplomatic stuttering of Britain and France had always been more conveniently incoherent than ever when the attitude of Soviet Russia was being considered.

I did not see the President again until early in the May of 1944, when he accorded me the privilege of the conversations I have finally decided by his leave to reproduce as an epilogue to my study of his career instead of incorporating the substance of them in the narrative.

He was then living at Aston Abbots, on the fringe of Buckinghamshire, half-way between Aylesbury and Leighton Buzzard, in one of the agreeable lesser country houses typical of the English countryside. The first thing I noticed was that the croquet hoops on the lawn had all been widened at the base, and, commenting on this to a friend who knew the household, I was told with a smile that the "dear Benešes" could not bear to see the efforts of their guests thwarted by the severely narrow and exclusive apertures of hoops *de rigueur* for match play, and I reflected that even croquet hoops by the President's standards had to be democratic.

We usually sat in a pleasant room full of books and maps, the President in an armchair of which his eagerness to conduct the conversation with a pair of spectacles held by one of the shafts prevented his taking full advantage. He was then on the edge of his sixtieth birthday; but the effect of his personality was of a man ten years younger at least, and this impression of comparative youth was sharpened by the care with which he was always dressed. It would be absurd to call him a dandy, but his ties and his shirts and his suit always appeared to have been chosen deliberately to get on with one another. He used to remind me of a well-preened chaffinch.

The more I saw of him the better I loved him. I have had the fortune to come into close contact with two of the outstanding European statesmen of our time—with Venizelos and with Beneš—and what I shall always admire most in both of them will not be their moral courage or mental agility or judicious restraint or any of the other qualities that combine to make great statesmen; it will be their goodness expressed by denial of self and charity towards their fellow men. I did not hear Dr Beneš pass harsh judgment unequivocally except upon one man, and when he read my account of Munich he asked me to modify it because he thought it was too bitter. I tried

to sweeten it to please him, but I know it still remains too bitter for his abundant goodwill. Perhaps if I had not been so repeatedly angered by sneers at Dr Beneš, sneers inspired by lack of political discrimination, excess of class prejudice, and the dustiest kind of religious intolerance, I might have been able to write of Munich with more of the President's own charity. When I see what I believe to be truth and justice in danger passion rules my pen at whatever cost either to my own reputation or to the feelings of other people.

I shall take advantage of that egotistical digression to insist that there is not an unkind observation in the whole of this book which Dr Beneš himself has not deprecated. A man with so much charity is necessarily an optimist, and the President's optimism is by now proverbial. If he has made mistakes they have all been the mistakes of optimism; and even the opportunism of which his critics make so much play is usually to be traced to such optimism. That eagerness to stand well with Moscow was as much in evidence long before ever Soviet Russia was brought into the war, because he was convinced from the beginning that sooner or later Russia must enter the war. It would be as sensible to denounce Mr Churchill as an opportunist for the speech he made on that June evening when Hitler struck at Russia as to denounce Dr Beneš for recognizing that the future of Czechoslovakia inevitably depended upon the goodwill of her immense and mighty neighbour. Every man with a quicker eye for cause and effect than most of his fellows is an opportunist. Mr Churchill had to eat a huge crusty pie of his own words about Russia. Honour such a fine digestion: if his stomach had been delicate his country would have been chewed up instead of his own words. President Beneš did not have to perform such a noteworthy feat of mastication. Honour him then as a more prudent dietician.

I once saw the President's famous optimism at work. It may seem a trivial enough example, but it illuminated his character for me. On one occasion he had made up his mind that our talk should take place out of doors, and when I reached Aston Abbots I found him in the garden. To me it looked like rain, and I said so. The President, spectacles in hand, cocked his head at the sky:

"I do not think so."

So I put my first question.

The President held forth. Heavy, slow rain-drops, the obvious heralds of a downpour, began to fall. The President frowned. Then he affected to ignore these Henleinist rain-drops and continued to talk. Presently he could not ignore them completely and made one of his

typical concessions to bring about a compromise. He pulled his chair back under a beech-tree. I followed with mine. For a minute or two the compromise seemed to be working. The extravagance of the Sudeten rain was being held in check. Only for a minute or two. An extra heavy drop hit the President's forehead. Another landed on his spectacles. Another fell on my nose. We moved farther under the beech-tree; but at last the President had to yield. He shook his head over the unreasonableness of the rain and led the way indoors.

"The invasion cannot be long now," I happened to observe.

"Surely it cannot," he agreed.

"And you have great hopes?"

"I am convinced that when the Allies are upon the Rhine the Germans will surrender to save their country from invasion."

And in the assurance of his tone there was a suggestion that, unreasonable though the Germans were, they were not quite so unreasonable as summer rain.

Dr Beneš speaks English fluently, but the effect of an American accent superimposed upon a strong Czech accent can make his fluency a bit of a puzzle for the first half-hour to a strange ear. However, except for a brief bewilderment when I thought Dr Beneš was talking about Tories whereas he was really talking about theories, I was never once in the slightest doubt of his meaning. To no question I asked him did he ever refuse a completely frank reply, but for various reasons all those replies cannot be set down in print. So many of them were asked to indulge myself in the pleasure of intercourse with an utterly sincere man that apart from reasons of State it would be an abuse of what I may call the President's moral hospitality to strain it too far. I was continually trying to ascertain why he had so many enemies, because deeply impressed as I was by his selflessness, his fairness, and his almost excessive tolerance, I could not understand the line of attack his opponents followed in presenting him as a master of duplicity and obsequious manoeuvre.

At last I have decided that the virtues of President Beneš are virtues in the existence of which the majority of worldly men do not believe, and that they can only account for the appearance of them in a statesman of his quality by assuming them to be an elaborate hypocrisy designed to aid the achievement of his ambition. If Beneš is indeed the political Tartuffe his enemies declare him to be it turns his predecessor, the great Masaryk, into one of those simple-hearted Dickensian figures which the novelist required to show off his Pecksniffs and Uriah Heeps. It means that for years in the most testing circumstances for human

merit Masaryk must have been deceived in the man he designated as his successor. This is an incredible hypothesis. It is so much easier to believe that Masaryk, to whose great soul, subtle intelligence, and spiritual force all testify, recognized not merely the political acuteness of Beneš but also the moral strength required to translate that political acuteness into terms of mundane significance.

It was Beneš who broke Hitler. Imagine a Czechoslovakia which yielded as Czechoslovakia did yield but without a Beneš to give that surrender the quality of self-sacrifice he was able to give it. Such a Czechoslovakia would not have left in the hearts of the Western democracies that shame which made a second surrender over Poland unimaginable. Hitler would certainly have been allowed to get away with it once more. Yes, it was Beneš who broke him, and if there was anything in that intuition of Hitler's he must have divined that in the end Beneš *would* break him.

"I am regarded in Central Europe as the symbol of democracy," the President once said to me, not boastfully but almost apologetically, in order to explain why he was so odious to Fascism.

And, indeed, nowhere in the world does there exist a man who so completely sums up in his own personality the most encouraging aspect of contemporary democracy. He is the exact opposite of Hitler, who was a product of the democracy he hated, and, indeed, contained in himself all that is evil in democracy.

The conversations between President Beneš and myself which follow were noted down by a stenographer; but I have re-arranged the sequence of some of them in order to avoid as far as possible too frequent change of topic, and here and there I have ventured to alter the President's phraseology to avoid the occasional ambiguity which creeps into conversation when one of the talkers is not using his own language. In the very first conversation I ventured to discuss the President's attitude towards religion, which has been so often misrepresented:

MACKENZIE: So, I gather, you became what we call an agnostic; were you influenced by any particular philosopher or merely by your experience of life?

BENEŠ: By both. I was a member of a large and very strict Catholic family, and we had a hard time of it. My father brought us all up on the principle that any man worth while is self-made. He was a little less severe with me than the others, I being the youngest of ten. My parents loved me very much and they tried to do something special for me: I was to be a priest. This seemed a suitable plan

because as a small boy I was extremely religious and had an ardent faith, the result of what William James would have considered a "religious experience."

MACKENZIE: How often did I return to James's book myself, to see if I could discover therein the explanation of a spiritual experience. Was yours a sudden conversion or was it a steady process?

BENEŠ: I remember going to Communion when I was ten and weeping afterwards at the thought of the wicked life I had led. I was very severe with myself. I not only felt the need of goodness, I really did try to lead a good life. I served Mass devoutly, and it was when I was serving that I experienced a sudden and violent anti-religious emotion. I was suddenly made aware, as it seemed for the first time, of all the 'secrets' of the Mass; it seemed like the shattering of an illusion. The mystery was gone; the priest became any ordinary member of the agricultural community in which we lived; the other altar-boys were no better than those who were not altar-boys.

Then I went to school in Prague. As a country boy I was physically more mature than the city boys and, therefore, I was more advanced mentally than they were.

MACKENZIE: That is the first time I have ever heard it argued that the country boy was mentally more precocious than the city boy. I think you must be an exception, Mr President.

BENEŠ [*with a shrug*]: I don't know. I know that from the age of twelve I was always looking for new books, and I was very fond of reading anti-religious pamphlets. At the age of fourteen I decided never to touch alcohol. I continued to develop rapidly. By sixteen I was on a level with most young men of twenty, with well-defined ideas of my own about religion, about sex, and about drink. Darwin influenced me greatly. So did my two elder brothers and their teachers, who were all free-thinkers.

MACKENZIE: Besides Darwin, which writers influenced you most?

BENEŠ: At this date I was very much under the influence of Zola.

MACKENZIE: I am inclined to think that Zola's influence upon youth during the last decade of the nineteenth century has been insufficiently realized. I know that my first reading of *Lourdes* at the age of sixteen was a shattering mental experience.

BENEŠ: I was most influenced by *L'Assommoir*, which I translated at the age of nineteen. Of our own Czech authors, Mácha was the chief influence. He was the first really great Czech poet of the modern era.

MACKENZIE: He has not been translated into English, I think?

BENEŠ: I think not.¹

MACKENZIE: When you went to Paris I suppose you were confirmed in your agnosticism?

BENEŠ: Oh, yes—all my first year there I was a complete sceptic. In 1906 I came to London for the first time, and there, in Hyde Park, my agnosticism was disturbed. In order to learn English quickly I used to spend two or three hours a day listening to the speakers, most of whom were talking about religion.

MACKENZIE [*surprised*]: You were really influenced by our Hyde Park spouters?

BENEŠ [*quickly*]: No, no, not by the speakers, but by the people who were listening to them. I said to myself that if so many people could come and listen to men talking about religion, then England must be, fundamentally, a religious country, and so I took to going to church in England to find out what English religion was like, and I was particularly impressed by so much simple piety and by the absence of formalism.

MACKENZIE: You rather surprise me by what you say. I should have thought that by 1906, except among Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics and a few exceptional congregations of the Free Churches, religion in England had already become a convention of manners without any spiritual profundity.

BENEŠ [*with an emphatic shrug*]: I know that when I returned to Paris from London I seemed to have returned from a people with a religious conception of life to a people with an entirely secular view of life, and the effect on me was to doubt my own agnosticism. I decided that in spite of the superficial arguments against it there must be something in religion, and I made up my mind to study religion again. This decision was intellectual and rational; emotion played no part in it. I was assailed by as many doubts about the validity of agnosticism as those by which I had been assailed over faith.

I now began to study Masaryk again from a new angle. As early as my sixteenth year I had counted myself a follower of Masaryk, who was a university professor and already a national figure. In all his philosophy religion played an outstanding rôle, so much so that, with the confidence of youth, I had begun to think Masaryk old-fashioned in this respect; but when I experienced my third religious crisis, in England, I read him with new eyes.

Having now decided to become a professor of sociology and

¹ Stephen Spender published a translation of some of Mácha's poetry a short time after this conversation.

philosophy, I paid particular attention to Dürkheim, the sociologist, and Bergson. I now began to consider Dürkheim's Socialist conceptions too blatantly materialistic and Bergson's philosophy, interesting as it was, came to seem superficial. Even Descartes began to lose his charm under Masaryk's critical attitude towards French rationalism. Masaryk had been much influenced by the English philosophers, and, paradoxically, it was Masaryk's study of Hume's scepticism which influenced his belief in God. Through Hume, Masaryk had realized that scepticism is a natural attribute of humanity, but that if a man wishes to be at peace with himself he must avoid the spiritual subjection which scepticism entails. So, through Masaryk, I came to study Hume, and through that study of Hume I decided that I must make my own definite choice between a spiritual and material conception of the universe. Of course, later, I studied all the other great classics of philosophy—Locke, Spencer, Comte, Kant, and the rest.

To help me to make the right choice, I now made an intensive study of Marx's materialistic Socialism; but the basis of Marxian materialistic Socialism is the elaboration of a moral conception which postulates an equal respect for all human beings, and I began to find it difficult to accept such a moral conception without a spiritual basis to inspire its validity. I came back to religion by a rational and scientific process. I saw both the material and the spiritual hypotheses as a metaphysical conception. My study of philosophy convinced me that the material hypothesis lacked scientific proof unless it was as much dependent upon faith as the spiritual hypothesis. I decided that if it was to be a question of two faiths I must choose my own faith from the one which offered the best fruits. If I accepted materialism as my creed I should have to believe in the animal part of man, in the relativity of everything, in the ego as the final moral standard, and in the omnipotence of man's will and intuition. Such a belief would base all practical politics on a conception of Will and Power. Nothing would be stable, nothing would be permanent, and I should have to believe, with the Germans, that *Might is Right*. I revolted against such a creed. I abhor personal egoism, whether it reveals itself in an individual or in the collective will of a nation to dominate other nations. I think humanity requires a permanent and universal standard which may be accepted by all nations at all periods, a standard by which the morality of the individual will be equally bound. The respect of one human being for another must depend upon an absolute standard of behaviour, not upon impermanent earthly likes and dislikes, upon transient emotions and immediate advantages.

Throughout the First World War and in the years after it I was constantly studying and meditating upon this problem, and finally I came to the conclusion (which I still maintain) that Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany, the terrible European depression, the fight for Communism, and all the manifold strife and struggle of the post-war years resulted from the people of the twentieth century being in disharmony with themselves. They were mentally sick; they had lost not only their faith but their ideals. Such happiness as they enjoyed was the gratification of their material desires in a world without moral standards. Such a conception of life was an example of the decline of true democracy, which, dependant as it is upon man's continuous moral development, requires absolute standards of religion. To me it seems that the Communists' conception of democracy is inadequate unless their moral ideals are inspired by the spiritual hypothesis; it could only lead to further wars and an abandonment of the truly democratic way of life. I realized that the political and economic conflict between the two wars was due to a moral conflict in the people themselves. A conception so brutally materialistic as German National Socialism must finally appeal to violence. All the developments of the last twenty years have assured me that I was right to accept the spiritual hypothesis.

Take my own experience at Munich. There I witnessed the miserable decline and collapse of Western Europe under the depreciation of moral standards when they were face to face with the brutal materialism of Fascism and Nazism. While I sympathized with the higher moral conception of Russian Communism I could not always accept the methods by which it was imposed. I know that the final aim of Communism is humanitarian and that in theory it condemns the exploitation of one nation by another as firmly as it condemns the exploitation of one man by another. The Marxian theory may reject a spiritual conception of life; but, in my opinion, it cannot avoid spiritual implications inherent in its own creed. So when at Munich I saw Western democracies which, in theory, acknowledged spiritual authority surrender to a low conception of life like Nazism and to the individual Hitler, who was the symbol of this low conception, I began to wonder whether my ideas were wrong, but I clung to my belief, and it was that which saved me from cynicism in everything or from a complete nervous, physical, and moral collapse.

MACKENZIE: Do you accept personal immortality as a corollary of the spiritual basis of human life?

BENEŠ: I think it is a natural conclusion, and it may be the reason why I now feel a sense of harmony in myself after years of meditation

on the problems of human existence. Generally speaking, we can say there are two kinds of individual—the predominantly intuitive and the predominantly rational: I belong to the second class. I know that the brain and the soul must be in harmony, but I know also that from a psychological point of view the mind is bound to develop in one direction more than the other. I developed intellectually. I tried not to let that intellectual development kill feeling and intuition, but I recognized that individuals whose minds were more developed in the direction of feeling and in intuition accepted religion less critically. I have returned to religion by way of the head rather than the heart.

MACKENZIE: Would you agree that the two prime religious conceptions are the absolute existence of God and the immortality of the human soul?

BENEŠ: I have always tried to settle those two questions by reason rather than by intuition. If you try to settle these questions by feeling and intuition you have what William James calls “a religious experience.” You feel the immortality of the soul; you believe, and you live religiously; but I should find it difficult to be dogmatic on any question answered by feeling rather than reason. Nevertheless, I do believe that in accepting those two conceptions—the immortality of the human soul and the absolute existence of God—one is accepting a logical conclusion.

MACKENZIE: If it is a logical conclusion, then surely the logic of it must have been revealed. Do you accept any revelation claimed by dogmatic religion as absolute truth?

BENEŠ: I am very doubtful in this because I think that a reasonable human mind can have only a religious experience of revelation.

MACKENZIE: Aren't you getting near to that relativity which you condemn in moral standards? But I don't want to argue, I only want to convey as accurately as I can your spiritual attitude. You are shy of dogma because your brain is suspicious of the amount of intuition regardless of reason that went to the making of it. However, once having granted the absolute existence of God, can you think of a more logical exposition of the Divine purpose than the great work of St Thomas Aquinas?

BENEŠ: I have not studied St Thomas Aquinas sufficiently to be able to answer you, so I hesitate to say anything. In my pursuit of philosophy perhaps I have unduly neglected theology.

MACKENZIE: I suppose when you rejected the idea of becoming a priest you naturally assumed that theology was outside your province as a student?

BENEŠ: Yes, I remember that before leaving the Gymnasium, at eighteen, I had to give a speech on the subject which interested me most. All pupils before leaving had to deliver such a speech. I remember that I took Darwin as my subject, but I felt a kind of apostolic fervour about his gospel.

MACKENZIE: And that warmth of Darwinian revelation is less fervid now? I am glad you recognize a certain emotional instability about our first encounters with science. Our contemporary intellectuals are inclined to suppose that religion enjoys a monopoly of the emotional thinking that is better called feeling.

BENEŠ: In discussing my personal relations with Catholicism and Protestantism, it must always be borne in mind that, as I told you, I came from a very Catholic family and, I should add, that, in a general way, preoccupation with religion in its relation to the State has been constant with the Czechs since the fifteenth century.

Religious reform began with John Hus one hundred years before Luther. We fought for our religious convictions almost throughout those hundred years, and so, to a large extent, our national policy became a fight between Rome and Prague. Finally George of Poděbrady achieved a *modus vivendi* with Rome in which we received some concessions, and this was considered a victory. But when everything was settled, and we were almost completely reconciled with Rome, the Reformation began in Germany. This had repercussions in Bohemia, and the old fight was renewed. The whole nation started quarrelling again—half of it standing for Catholicism and the other half, still calling themselves Hussites, leaning towards the new Protestantism.

After the Thirty Years War, in which we were defeated, Bohemia was incorporated in Austria, and, in the process of Catholicization, we were almost destroyed as a nation. Three hundred years of political slavery followed, and it was not until after the French Revolution that we really began to revive. This is an historical fact learned at school which impresses every young Czech. The Czech Protestants who were banished by the Habsburgs after the Thirty Years War were regarded as exiled patriots and Catholicism became identified with de-nationalization, and the fact that the Catholic Church was used by the Habsburgs as an instrument in the destruction of Czech nationality caused the Vatican to be regarded as a hostile political force often even by Czech Catholics themselves.

In the original Hussite wars Czechs were fighting against an alliance between the Papacy and the German Empire and therefore Germans remain the hereditary enemy. This set up a kind of dualism in the Czech

mind after the Reformation: as Protestants, the Germans were accepted as allies against the Habsburgs and the Vatican, but as Protestants they were rejected because they were Germans. That dualism exists to this day. When the Republic was reconstituted I used every effort to establish complete reconciliation with the Vatican, but I did not completely succeed. On the whole, the Czechs are not hostile to the Church, nor are they friendly. These difficulties will probably arise again after this war.

Many Czechs, critical of the political attitude of the Catholic Church, are inclined to look upon Protestantism as a more liberal religion. The fact that Masaryk became a Protestant had, too, a profound influence. My personal point of view is clear; there is something about Protestantism which I do not like—the fact is that there is more in it that I positively dislike. The philosophic basis of Protestantism is intuitive, instinctive, and romantic, which I dislike. Furthermore, it is uncertain and inconsistent. Yet it is more liberal and tolerant than Catholicism. I consider it extremely important to be liberal, but I don't like liberalism when it becomes a synonym for indifference. However bigoted, narrow, and stupid Catholicism may sometimes appear in action, its philosophy is based more firmly upon reason, and its development trusts to logic.

Catholicism is sometimes accused of being anti-democratic. In my experience Protestantism is capable of becoming equally anti-democratic, and hence the hold it has always had in Germany, where the chief resistance to Nazism came from Catholics. It is dangerous to generalize too much, but I still affirm that it is easy to lose all sense of absolute standards in Protestantism, and I have never considered (as it is generally considered in all discussion in our country) that to be a Protestant is a sign of a superior attitude of mind.

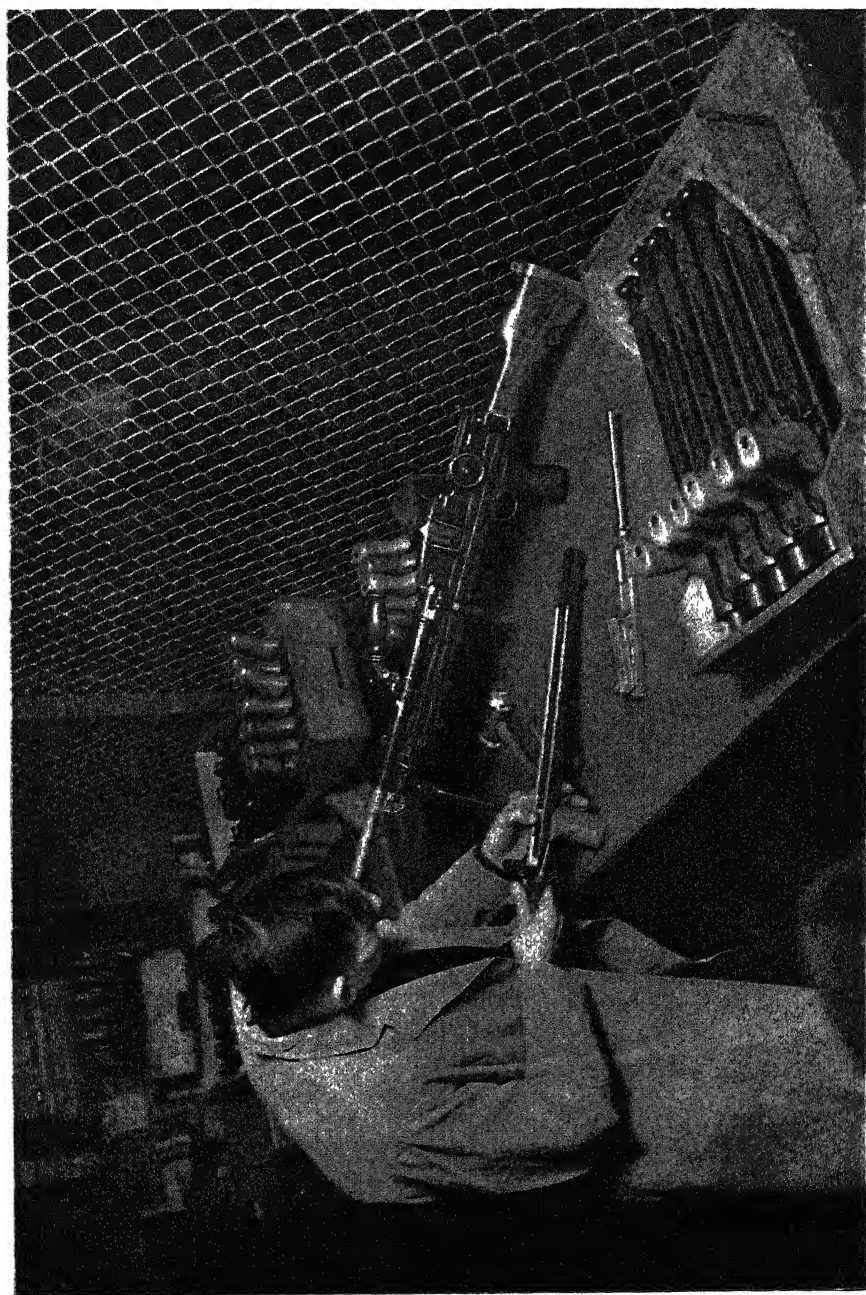
MACKENZIE: Might not one say that, as with democracy, the strength of Catholicism is the weakest link of the chain, whereas in Protestantism the strength of the chain depends upon its strongest link?

BENEŠ: You are right. The individual Protestant to whom liberty of thought allowed a wider mental development often shows a better example of mankind, but he remains an individual example, and therefore can be as anti-democratic as a dictator in politics.

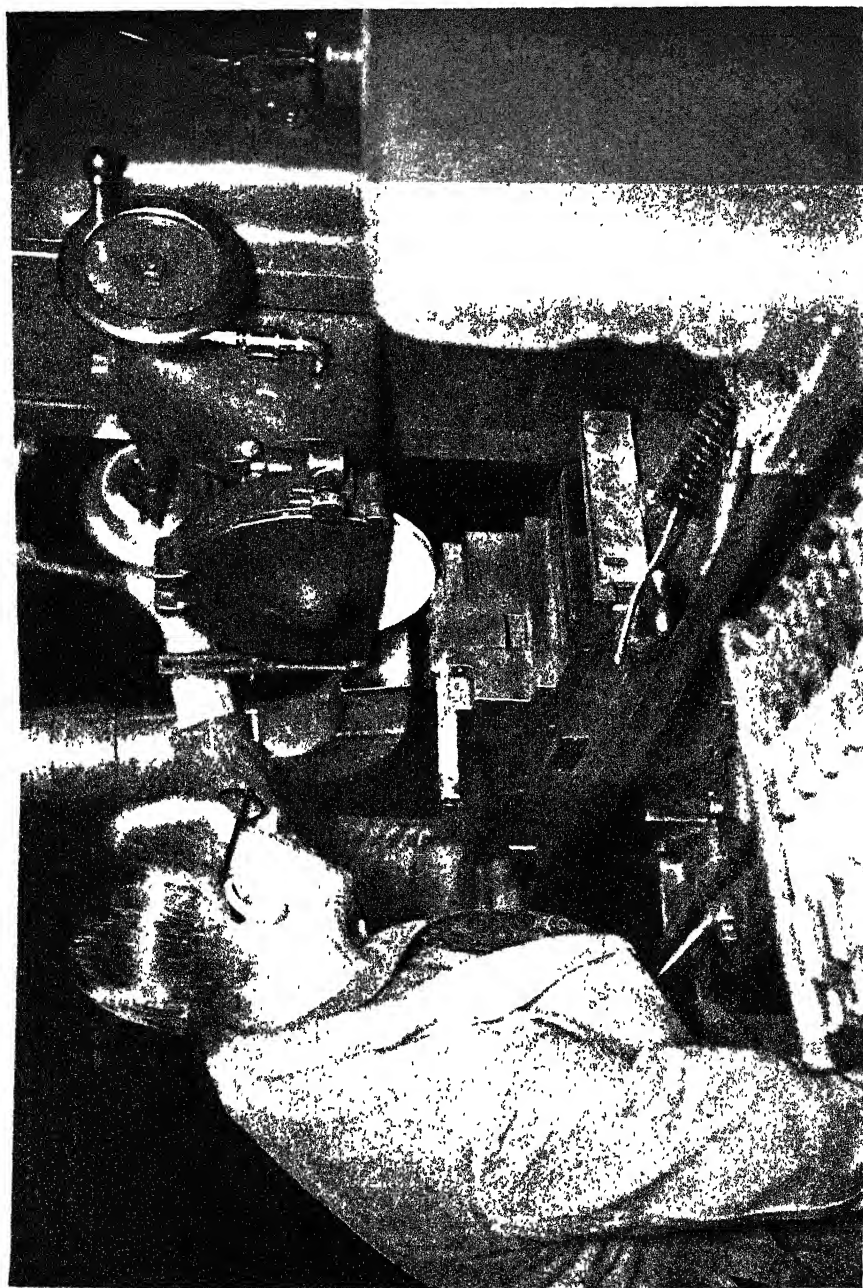
MACKENZIE: Don't you think it is true to say that England has remained fundamentally democratic because she never became really Protestant?

BENEŠ [*a little doubtfully*]: It may be so.

MACKENZIE: Have you ever discussed philosophy with Stalin?



THE CZECH WAR EFFORT IN BRITAIN
Final inspection of a Bren gun by a Czech war-worker.



A CZECH WAR-WORKER IN BRITAIN
At the grinding wheel.

BENEŠ: No, we never had any time to discuss philosophy. Of course, I have read his book; in that he is definitely Marxian.

MACKENZIE: You are a happy man, I think, Mr President?

BENEŠ: Well, as I explained to you, from my youth I have always been a very logical one. That is why I have mentally survived this long period of war and revolution. I was a self-made man. When I left my village I went to Paris without any worldly knowledge; I arrived there with thirty francs in my pocket. I lived in extreme poverty. My wife was imprisoned during the last war and members of my family. I have worked constantly at my desk for sixteen to eighteen hours a day almost the whole of my life; I have had all sorts of difficulties to solve. And there was Munich. But throughout I have tried to settle my human problems logically and with restraint, until finally I think I have acquired a harmonious conception of life. By nature I am an optimist. In the most difficult position I have never despaired. In politics I always behave as though I were playing tennis. When my opponent is 'forty' and I am 'love' and the next ball may be the last I am still convinced that I can win the game! To this attitude I attribute many political successes which at the time seemed beyond imagination. Through the study of modern philosophy I have attained an internal harmony. I have lived in such a way as to avoid having anything on my conscience with which I could reproach myself. I have no guilty regrets, and, although I have had very strong opponents, I have never been spiritually worried by them because I have always dealt straightforwardly with them. After twenty-six years in office I have, naturally, collected a great number of enemies in every direction and in every country, but one takes that for granted. They cannot disturb my internal harmony.

Before Munich I tried, during the most critical moments of the life of my nation, to do everything to satisfy everybody, but I did not succeed. I accepted my defeat in the conviction that it was only a temporary defeat and that I should at last emerge victorious. That gave me an inner tranquillity. I have no worries about the future from the personal point of view like most politicians. I have finished my work and done my best, and I shall present that work to the nation at home. If I retire I shall be quite content, and that contentment will be due to my philosophic and moral conception of this earthly existence.

MACKENZIE: To the spiritual hypothesis.

BENEŠ: Yes, I think it is true to say that.

MACKENZIE: I suppose we can take it as an axiom that the corner stone of democracy is education?

BENEŠ: In modern democratic life education must be universal; it is, indeed, a fundamental pillar of democracy.

MACKENZIE: To what age do you think education should be continued?

BENEŠ: Well, there must be general education up to a certain age—up to 12, 13, 14, or 15.

MACKENZIE: Is education even up to 15 of much value if it stops there?

BENEŠ: Certainly 14 or 15 is the minimum for everybody now, but as modern democracy evolves, the age limit for compulsory education must be extended.

MACKENZIE: I hope it *will* be education and not merely imparting information. Don't you think we exaggerate the importance of mere information?

BENEŠ: I agree that is a dangerous tendency of modern life. Compare the system on the Continent with the British system. The British system has one great advantage over the Continental one—you educate the personality far more than we do; we try to give them too many mere facts.

On the Continent even university education tends to pay too much attention to the accumulation of facts.

MACKENZIE: In other words, knowledge does not always mean wisdom?

BENEŠ: No, indeed, and I prefer your system to ours.

MACKENZIE: I think you flatter our system as it works at the moment. I have observed a feverish rush for facts ever since so much of our education has been Americanized. The Labour Party, in their laudable desire to give every man and woman a fair chance, must be careful not to standardize education in the interests of the least common multiple.

BENEŠ: There certainly is a danger of that; it is perceptible in your new Education Bill.

MACKENZIE: I toiled through that Bill in the pages of *Hansard* and was horrified to note how few words were said about education itself and how many about the externals of education. I recognize the importance of good sanitation, but I think the sanitation of the mind should not be omitted.

I am sure it is a fallacy to suppose that, for instance, an Eton education would enjoy any advantage over a Council education if

Council standards are to be substituted for Eton standards. If old buildings are a desideratum, we can find plenty for the local education committees.

BENEŠ: Ah, well, after a certain time you will see the effect of your experiments, and if they do not justify themselves you will return to the old system.

MACKENZIE: I feel doubtful about that. It will be difficult to go back; education depends upon continuity. There are plenty of possible educational reforms which were not mentioned in the discussions on the new Bill. For instance, why not bring scholarships nearer to their founders' intentions by reserving them, strictly, for those who could not otherwise afford such an education? By all means grant scholarships to those who can, but let them be honorary scholarships without any financial advantage. But, surely, what is most important of all is to give teachers a higher status than they possess now. It seems to me that the headmaster of a large secondary school has a right to as great a financial and social reward as a leading barrister or a doctor.

BENEŠ: There you are absolutely right. Take, for example, the organization of education in our country; what you are trying to achieve with your Bill already existed in our Republic. There was universal education; there was help for poorer school-children; there were schools everywhere; but the teachers lacked the necessary status. It was a question of money. The equipment of the schools meant a very large budget for our Ministry of Education, and if the financial status of the teachers had been raised the budget would have mounted still higher.

MACKENZIE: In other words, you too considered externals more important than essentials?

BENEŠ: Ah, but we had realized our mistake, and our plans were laid when Hitler upset everything. We decided to establish special schools for the instruction of teachers without a university education. As things were, a secondary school-teacher was obliged to have a university education, but the village school-teacher required no more than a Teachers' Training College, which was not up to university standard.

MACKENZIE: That is exactly how it works in Scotland to-day and, in my opinion, Scottish education is going to the dogs. There was a time when the village teacher was the backbone of an education which was famous throughout Europe, and the creation of two classes of teacher—by making a university education compulsory for secondary school-teachers—only succeeded in lowering the standard of village education without raising the standard of secondary education. The

result is that our Scottish universities, which, you will remember, follow the Continental system, have become merely glorified technical colleges. I hope your universities are managing to avoid what I consider such a degeneration.

BENEŠ: We try to maintain a university standard, but, in my opinion, all teachers should reach that standard, and I believe we shall be able to exercise selection and create a special category of teachers with appropriate remuneration and status.

MACKENZIE: In the Middle Ages, the University of Prague set a good example. After the war, might not a University of Prague set that example to Europe again?

BENEŠ: Such things have happened. If we have a general movement which pushes people forward, like that, for instance, which in the Middle Ages found its expression in John Hus, or if we have a man like Masaryk who pursues the advance of education as his personal programme, what might not be possible in our Republic after the war?

And certainly there will be a widespread political and social movement which, after the interruption of five years of foreign tyranny, will inspire such an advance: it rests with youth.

MACKENZIE: Prague is the key to Europe. It is the strategic centre of the European mind; it is the clearing-house for the ideas of Western and Eastern Europe.

BENEŠ: I agree. Czechoslovakia occupies a key position—politically, geographically, and also spiritually. We are between the East and the West, partaking of both.

During the next two or three generations Russia will undoubtedly maintain and even increase the speed of her development, although that development will not be fundamentally opposed to the West, and it will be our duty and privilege to be in the centre of the line of communications. We shall be willing to learn much from Russia, and we shall turn our eyes far more towards Russia than we did before; but we shall most jealously defend our own position. We shall not sacrifice our own spiritual independence and our own spiritual ideology. We shall strive continuously for collaboration between the West and the East because conflict between the two would mean complete disaster for Czechoslovakia.

MACKENZIE: What will Stalin say to this? Will he favour the notion of making Prague University a kind of mutual intellectual centre?

BENEŠ [*pensively*]: While this is only a kind of dream, as an idea it is extremely interesting, and I find it encouraging that you have such an idea. It is an idea which I should like to try to realize. We have

already put forward part of this idea in Moscow. For instance, we have already one university professor¹ there who is forging intellectual links between Prague and Moscow.

I myself tried to impress the professors at Moscow and Leningrad with the same idea in 1935 when the Russo-Czechoslovak Alliance was signed. We ought to interest ourselves more than before—we with the development of Russian ideas, they with the development of Czechoslovak ideas. During the last twenty years, most of the Russian political refugees have been concentrated, almost entirely, in Prague, and for some time we had there a Russian University and a Ukrainian University. We educated more than 4000 of these young Russian students, who were almost all *a priori* anti-Bolshevik. Nevertheless, 2000 of them returned to Russia as doctors, engineers, etc., to collaborate in Stalin's Five-year Plan. That was a beginning. After the war I know that a number of Russian students will come to Prague, and I hope that as many Czechoslovak students will go to Russia. We have tried to make an arrangement with your Government to send every year at least 25 to 50 students to English and Scottish Universities, and we hope to arrange for a certain number of British students to come to Prague. We shall do all we can, but the chance to further the idea of your dream will depend on how many British and how many Russian students will decide to come to Prague for their studies and thus bring together young people prepared to develop a better understanding between the West and the East.

MACKENZIE: Might not Cracow follow your example? Those two great universities of medieval Europe could radiate learning; but do let it be learning and not technical information or the propaganda of preconceived ideas.

I cannot understand why my own University of Oxford has caught this fever to become a technical college.

BENEŠ: No, Oxford should have remained the centre of the humanities.

MACKENZIE: How does Russia feel about the humanities?

BENEŠ: Well, of course, the Russians are very much occupied with technical education at present. However, they must return at last to the humanities even if the present generation is too busy being practical.

¹ Professor Zdeněk Nejedlý, Professor of History of the Slavonic Nations; formerly Professor of History of Music, Charles University, Prague; author of monographs on Smetana and Masaryk. He became Minister of Education in the first Czechoslovak Cabinet after liberation.

MACKENZIE: Then, this lamentable devotion to propaganda —

BENEŠ: Propaganda is the inevitable result of the ideological war in Europe. The First World War showed the effect of propaganda. In fact, it achieved miracles; unfortunately they were bad miracles. Propaganda means educating people with half-knowledge, half-truths, and too often whole lies; everything is relative. There is no absolute truth but many truths; everybody accommodates truth to his own interests and desires. We have had the 'Nazi truth'; we have had the 'Fascist truth'; we have had the 'Communist or Socialist truth'; we have had the 'anti-Communist or anti-Socialist truth.' Under the influence of these various truths, people accommodate facts to suit them, but the real man remains uneducated. He becomes the slave of the practical needs of everyday life, and in the struggle to achieve them he fails to perceive the existence of an Absolute Truth with a universal value. We must return to the Absolute. The present war was largely due to the ignoring of the Absolute and the worship of the Relative. Man, in losing his belief in God, has lost belief in himself.

Statesmen of the years which followed the First World War all suffered from moral indifference and absence of faith. The men who sacrificed a small democratic country to an inhuman gangster like Hitler did not believe in absolute standards of right and wrong. They could see no further than the claims of immediate expediency.

MACKENZIE: There was a similar moral collapse when the Roman Republic gave way to the Roman Empire.

BENEŠ: You are right; and the same state of mind will be prevalent after this war unless the post-war democracies return to a belief in something higher than expediency.

MACKENZIE: We left off in a rather pessimistic mood, an unusually pessimistic mood for you, Mr President. I don't see how we are going to get back to the Absolute until a positive form of religion is taught in the schools. Can we hope to create an ultimately ideal collectivism if, meanwhile, we neglect the individual human soul? For the moment, intellectual opinion seems to be building a beautiful cart to put before a half-starved horse.

BENEŠ: If we base modern Socialism entirely on Marxian dialectical materialism, we must finally reach Totalitarianism, and that is what happened with the Nazis. Such Totalitarianism must fail because it will have no soul. Modern Democracy, whether it expresses itself in Marxism or Communism, cannot develop without respecting the individual. To respect the individual you must have faith in personality,

and a belief in personality constitutes a religious idea. If you wish to save Democracy, the religious idea must be restored. There is no other alternative to materialistic totalitarianism, the most evil expression of which we have witnessed in Germany.

Now, Communism may have injured the individual in the course of trying to establish itself practically, but the fundamental basis of it is humanitarian, and when it employs totalitarian methods to fulfil its purpose Communism destroys its own ideological basis.

After the success of the great Russian experiment it would be absurd for the Communist Party in Russia to fear an anti-materialistic philosophy and, therefore, to refuse tolerance in such a philosophy. In my own opinion Communism will not only find it necessary to tolerate religion but will find it impossible to develop Communism without surrendering again to the need of humanity for spiritual values.

MACKENZIE: There are many who argue that humanity is passing beyond the stage of being able to believe in a supernatural religion.

BENEŠ: I think a capacity for that belief is a permanent attribute of the human mind. Roughly, we can say that the whole history of humanity reveals two schools of thought—one that looks to earth and the other that looks to the sky. One has denied all metaphysics and all religion; the other holds that even science must make its ultimate aim the discovery of absolute truth and the justification of the belief in God. I don't think that humanity can ever rid itself of the struggle between the material and the spiritual, for I think that this struggle is, of itself, an expression of the spirit of man.

MACKENZIE: I find all discussion about the Absolute meaningless if one avoids facing up to the individual's prime speculation, and if I were asked to name the chief cause for the distraction of our period I should say it was the increasing doubt in the mind of the individual of his own personal and self-conscious immortality.

BENEŠ: You are right. I believe that the individual's doubt about his own spiritual destiny has reacted on his behaviour, for after all, there have been many ages of human development when the vast majority of the human race have not believed in personal immortality. The problem has always been the same. My argument is that the more we know about the universe in the material sense, the more arguments we find for personal immortality. I have already told you how from being passionately atheistic with the little learning I had acquired I came to find this more and more unsatisfying as I learned more. Finally I reached a solution when I had satisfied myself that the materialistic conception of life was as incapable of being based on

scientific principles as the spiritual conception. I saw that the materialistic conception produced all sorts of ills which the spiritual conception would have avoided.

MACKENZIE: Like those who, having resolved to try Christianity, find that it works. For that reason I maintain the necessity of religious teaching to the young. They must be given the advantage of humanity's spiritual experience, as well as humanity's material experience. Education as I see it is preparing the individual to be able to achieve the maximum benefit from experience; but there lies before us a long, difficult period when universal education, handicapped by the amount of leeway it has to make up, will produce a standardized race of semi-educated people.

BENEŠ: That is a problem, and we already know that a semi-educated class is the most dangerous class in every kind of society. Therefore we cannot afford to surrender to materialism during this period. We must insist that democracy will destroy itself without a spiritual standard by which it may advance. If we base our education on respect for the soul of man we imply belief in an absolute value which can only be discovered in God.

MACKENZIE: And we must fight this idea that a curriculum imposed upon a whole nation is enough. How is that to be done?

BENEŠ: Well, in the present age, when we are making education compulsory, to a certain extent, everything must have a common basis. In the Middle Ages, when education was not universal, only the élite were really educated.

MACKENZIE: We may have to seem reactionary in our education and aim at educating the masses as the Middle Ages educated their élite.

BENEŠ: You mean we must return to the humanities. Well, I cannot say I don't agree with you. I don't want to speak slightly of technical schools, but I still believe that a classical education (our old system of the Gymnasium) and the best of such schools should be encouraged.

MACKENZIE: I attribute the decay of British politics to the decay of classical education. Munich might never have happened if Mr Chamberlain had been a good Greek and Latin scholar. And that goes for most of the members of his Cabinet.

BENEŠ: In our country, we hold fast to the humanities. Our secondary schools and our universities are still established on the basis of the old Prague University of the Middle Ages with all its privileges and, of course, its own system of teaching the Latin language. When a Czech priest without English comes to this country, he always suggests to one of your priests that they should speak in Latin. Our priest is

usually fluent, but yours is not. Mgr Sramek, our Prime Minister, does not speak much English, and when he goes to Oxford he likes to talk in Latin, which he speaks very fluently. He is sometimes understood, but he seldom gets an answer. We have retained the medieval pronunciation of Latin of course.

In my opinion, the world's culture is based on Latin and Greek culture, and not to participate in it means a spiritual and cultural impoverishment.

MACKENZIE: We can say, generally, that the culture of Western Europe is based on Latin culture. Can we not say that the root of Russian culture is found in Greek? Let Prague University become the fount of both and restore to Europe so much of what Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, and even Bologna have lost. What does Stalin say to that?

BENEŠ: I think Russia is too much occupied at the present time with practical matters; they would not understand such an idea. They are still too much in the Lenin period, esteeming medicine and engineering above philosophy and history. However, the cultivation of philosophy and history is beginning again in their universities, and when the practical side of their great experiment has been fully developed they will return to idealistic thinking.

MACKENZIE: You would not call Stalin an idealist?

BENEŠ: No, he is a convinced materialist. In his book *Leninism* he explains very lucidly the whole revolutionary doctrine of Russian Communism. Stalin's spiritual conception is that no man must exploit another but that every one must have the right to live as well as possible. The whole of their system and doctrine is limited to that basis. However, when this generation passes and that system has been clearly established, there will probably be a spiritual crisis. Already they have been obliged to concede a measure of liberty to religion. Their "Godlessness" was tried, and it ended in a fiasco. That campaign has now ceased, partly because of the pressure of world-opinion but chiefly because they realized that religion was not useless to their own people, the many of whom retain their old traditions. So far, religion is only tolerated as a concession, but this concession will reach greater and greater proportions, and the moment must inevitably come when a purely materialistic philosophy will be found insufficient; when, in fact, they discover that however much bread there is men cannot live by bread alone.

MACKENZIE: I hope that we shall apply ourselves to the problem of educating people to enjoy and to take the fullest advantage of the

leisure that the further development of machinery must entail for the human race.

BENEŠ: That is another problem, but we can be optimistic about this.

MACKENZIE: A good deal of our educational hopes depend on which way industry develops. I feel a little apprehensive of the ultimate effect of excessive industrialism on the individual.

BENEŠ: Well, we are now right in the middle of modern industrialism and its development. In Czechoslovakia we shall try to maintain an even plan so that approximately half the population will be in the country and the other half in the cities. In Great Britain and Germany, there is I think, an unhealthy disproportion between the rural and urban population. Obviously the industrialism of modern States is unavoidable, and that means large industries and large factories. Scientific methods applied to industry and the need to make every man's work as effective as possible demand large industries and large factories. I imagine in the future most of these large industries will be taken out of the hands of individuals and placed in the hands of the community. I declare it is part of my programme to establish such a system in our Republic after the war. We are one of the greatest producers of armaments, and I have no doubt that the manufacture of armaments will come under the supervision of the State. To what extent we shall place it in the hands of the community will depend on later evolution.

The danger of such a change is the creation of an economic bureaucracy. The Russians have avoided that by creating a system whereby the factories were partly the property of the people who work in them. Our own Bata system is a most efficient system of production, but, in my opinion, it should be in the hands of all the people who work in it. How this transfer will be organized is another question.

I fancy that in our future Republic we shall allow three categories of property: (1) Individual Property, (2) State, Municipal, Regional, and Provincial Property, and (3) Co-operative Property. By Co-operative Property I mean a factory in the hands of all the people working in it, which can be run on the same basis as an individual enterprise but of which the profit will not go into the pocket of one proprietor; it will be distributed according to a pre-arranged allotment, recognizing the individual part the various workpeople play. We shall also have a certain number of factories in the hands of the State, of which the profit will go to the community as a whole. In the matter of land, we shall establish a system similar to that of the factories. Large estates, however, will be allowed only to the state or

provinces and municipalities. Co-operatively owned land property can be a large estate in which a certain number of people will live, each allotted a certain acreage.

MACKENZIE: Won't all this tend to turn men into machines?

BENEŠ: I agree that the outlook is discouraging for personality and, to some extent, disastrous. On the other hand, the peasant is still able to preserve his freedom of development. As things are, I really don't see any possibility of escaping a system whereby many millions of people develop in one direction collectively and others with more liberty in their work will develop individually. That is what is happening in Russia, which can still maintain her individual shops and individual artisans. I don't see why modern society should completely surrender to the system of great factories. Besides the great Bata factory we still have the small shoemaker proud of making a better shoe than can be made in a factory. Modern society must have a certain number of people whose work is very limited in its scope—many thousands who will only do two, three, four, or five machine movements throughout their life. On the other hand, the peasants will retain their more varied life. Sections of the community will become mechanized; the others will never be mechanized or touched by the mechanization of modern life.

MACKENZIE [*doubtfully*]: I wonder.

BENEŠ: Perhaps you think I am too optimistic?

MACKENZIE: But who in your mechanized society will ever want to buy individual products?

BENEŠ: Well, I lived for twenty years in the country, and, being the son of a peasant, I did a peasant's work. When I see how they do it now I don't find it any less interesting. On the contrary, I think when they do it with practice it is far more efficient, and the result is more encouraging for the individual. It needs even more intelligence and even more application for the individual's spirit. I don't see that it is tending too much to mechanization.

MACKENZIE: Have we had time yet to see the effect of partial mechanization on peasant populations?

BENEŠ: It is most difficult to say, but it has yet to be proved that the reaction will be harmful. In Russia mechanization is progressively reducing the hours of daily work. Mechanized work for twelve hours a day may be terrible, but six hours of it is quite another matter. I am convinced the evolution of machinery will make work so productive that the daily hours will be shortened more and more as they already are in Russia and America.

MACKENZIE: If I were to attempt to prophesy I should prophesy that the great war of the future will be between the urban and the rural populations of Europe when the phosphates are exhausted, as they will be in about sixty years, and when the peasants will not submit to being the food-slaves of the urban population.

BENEŠ: Well, I shall have to be optimistic and believe that science will discover a substitute for phosphates.

MACKENZIE: I shall only allow myself to hope that the rural population will succeed in winning the war, and if they do, it will be because they have remained more individualistic than the urban population.

BENEŠ: Well, I don't fear the destruction of the individual by the industrial system and certainly not by machinery. Think what individuals have been created by aviation and, for that matter, by the films.

MACKENZIE: Films have produced nothing more than profiles of individuals.

BENEŠ: But who knows what the future will evolve in mechanization? I am not afraid.

MACKENZIE: Did you find mechanization has a deadening effect on the individual in Russia?

BENEŠ: Not at all; but that does not provide a criterion for Western civilization. Twenty years ago the population of Russia consisted of 95 per cent. peasants, 4 per cent. industrial workers, and 1 per cent. intelligentsia. That percentage is now completely changed. Industrialism has rapidly developed; illiteracy has completely disappeared; education is universal. Therefore, in Russia, mechanization has helped the development of the individual. The establishment of the so-called Communist society has raised every human being to a higher level. Art, science, education, drama, films have all been developed to their benefit. Musical and dramatic art are at a particularly high level. The so-called "free" professions are paid on a very high basis. For instance, exactly as here, a skilled doctor gets for his operations thousands of roubles. A really important writer is a very rich man in Russia. Take the late Alexei Tolstoi; he received enormous royalties, and he could do what he liked with his money except buy a factory or land and employ other people. He could go to the Riviera; he could have any number of cars; he could even have plenty of servants, providing he paid them according to official trade union rates. Anyway, the artist cannot be accused of exploiting his fellow-men as they are always exploited in a capitalistic society.

MACKENZIE: I want you to say something about the Slovaks if you will. I think none of us in this country feels at all certain just what the relationship between the Czechs and the Slovaks is.

BENEŠ: I could almost say that the relationship between the Czechs and the Slovaks is like that between the English and the Scots. There are eight million Czechs and two and a half million Slovaks. Slovakia wished to decentralize the State for administrative purposes.

MACKENZIE: Wanted Home Rule, in fact.

BENEŠ: The constitution of the Republic was unanimously adopted in 1920 by all Czechs and Slovaks, but gradually about half the Slovaks began to oppose a centralized Constitution. My own opinion is that we did centralize too much, and I was always opposed to it. It was not until 1926 that any movement among the Slovaks for decentralization, *i.e.*—for a Slovak Diet—took definite shape. I favoured a Slovak Diet, but I did not want it to be constituted in an irregular way; I wanted a democratic agreement. Although personally I favoured in principle a Diet and an extension of local government, there were Czech political parties much against it, and it became a political question. Half of the Slovaks themselves preferred centralization—particularly the Progressives. The Conservative Slovaks wanted decentralization.

MACKENZIE: Just the opposite of Northern Irish opinion.

BENEŠ: Politically, but as in Northern Ireland religion was mixed up in politics. The Liberal Slovaks who were mostly Protestant were afraid of a Conservative Slovak majority which was entirely Catholic. It was not until 1938 that any real separatism began, but once it did begin it received full Catholic support. I am still in favour of decentralization, and after the war I should like to see a Diet in Brno for Moravia, one in Bratislava for Slovakia, and one in Užhorod for Ruthenia. Each Diet would elect an Executive Council, and the Central Government would co-ordinate the legislation of the three Diets and the administration of the Executive Councils. Thus provincial autonomy would be established. The extent of the legislative and executive power allowed the provinces is still a matter of argument, but I think I can speak for the Czechs when I say that we are in favour of very considerable decentralization.

I cannot really admit the existence of a 'Slovak problem.' But there is another more difficult question: are the Czechs and Slovaks one or two nations? Most of the Czechs believe that they are one. This belief is shared by about one-third of the Slovaks, but the other two-thirds consider we are two nations. I believe that we are one nation. Until

1845 there was no Slovak literary language. The Czech and Slovak national cultures were the same. There is a much higher proportion of Protestants in Slovakia than in Bohemia and Moravia because in Hungary, unlike Austria, Protestantism was tolerated after the Thirty Years War. Generally speaking, the Slovak Protestants believed before the Second World War in one nation and the Catholics in two nations. In 1845 a Slovak scholar, Štúr, composed from one of the dialects a literary language in order to save the Slovak national culture from Magyarization. When this literary language was stabilized the Magyars, Germans, and Poles began to encourage the idea of a Slovak nation in order to counterbalance the nationalism of the Czechs, and after the First World War all separatist tendencies were encouraged. We argued against separation by pointing out that two million Slovaks were insufficient for a national culture. Czechs and Slovaks together amounted to ten millions and that represented a strong cultural force. In politics eight and two are not always ten; they can be six, if two and eight quarrel. However, if somebody wishes to be independent, nothing can be done about it. I say to the Slovaks—"Well, if you are Slovak, and you have the conscience to be Slovak, I cannot say that you are not, because the question of nationality is not only a question of a separate language. Two nations can have the same language and be two nations like the British and the Americans; or they can have two languages like the English and the Welsh and be one nation."¹

[*Continuing to address Slovak 'die-hards' and waving his glasses more eloquently than ever*]: "The fundamental question is one of conscience. The fundamental thing to be or not to be a Slovak is if you feel you are a Slovak. If you feel you are a Slovak, I have nothing against it, but, gentlemen, *I* feel Czechoslovak; what can you say against that? All your national Slovak writers, beginning with the oldest up to the present, are my spiritual property because I feel Czechoslovak. For to me there is not a Czech nation and a Slovak nation; there is a Czechoslovak nation. However, if you wish to be Slovak you are Slovak, I remain Czechoslovak, and as I have complete tolerance I shall never quarrel with you about that. Therefore, gentlemen, please let us be tolerant with one another."

¹ Dr Beneš, leaning forward in his armchair and waving his spectacles as he addressed an imaginary audience of Slovak 'die-hards,' presented so engaging a picture of passionate conviction that I had not the heart to interrupt him by pointing out that there was hardly a Welshman who believed he belonged to the same nation as the English.

MACKENZIE: I wish you would talk like that to some of the editors of our Catholic Press in this country, Mr President, but I fear they have succumbed to Slovak eloquence. You must remember that in this country there is still a slight hang-over from Munich, therefore a lot of people are glad to believe that you really were a crypto-Communist. Moreover, the fact that many people feel under an uncomfortable obligation to Russia makes them resentful, and because they cannot criticize Russia they criticize you. Such a frame of mind sets up a receptive credulity, and they believe the worst of you as a vicarious way of believing the worst about Russia. Hence the success of what I shall have to call the Catholic vendetta.

BENEŠ: Our Prime Minister, Mgr Šrámek, is a Catholic and has the Czech Catholics, without exception, behind him. The Slovak Catholics are always more reactionary than the Czechs, and the militants have always regarded me with suspicion, for I have never made and never will make any compromise with my convictions.

Yet I have remained on good terms with the less intransigent of the Slovak Catholics. They recognized that as Minister of Foreign Affairs I was determined to achieve a settlement with the Vatican of all outstanding questions. Ever since the days of John Hus, the Vatican has regarded the Czechs as trouble-makers. Even after the Thirty Years War, when they were re-Catholicized, the Czechs continued to make John Hus their national hero. The Habsburgs played on the religious prejudice of the Vatican to justify their subjection of the Czechs. When we were liberated after the last war I had the support of our political leaders in making a final effort to resolve all differences. I foresaw the situation; I was trying to prepare a future agreement throughout the last war. When I visited Rome in 1915, 1916, and 1917 I did my best to establish contact with the Vatican in order to convince them there that a Czechoslovak State after the war would not be an enemy of the Catholics. I never achieved direct contact, but Cardinal Bourne managed to put me in touch indirectly, and through him I forwarded several memoranda on future policy. I gave guarantees then that Catholic interests would be maintained and that wild anti-clericalism would not be encouraged. I risked my own future position by doing this, because, after the persistent way in which the Austrian Government had used the Catholic Church to repress Czech national feeling, I knew that with the achievement of independence there would be many Czechs determined to confiscate all Church property. I succeeded in stemming this wave of intolerance and confronted public opinion with a *fait accompli* by immediately establishing diplomatic

relations with the Vatican. I was seriously attacked, but I refused to give way to clamour, and finally I brought round public Czech opinion to favour a reasonable settlement of the question. In this I was helped, of course, by the strong Catholic movement among both the Czechs and Slovaks. I began to negotiate with the Vatican for the clarification of the position between State and Church. Being anxious to avoid a clash between the Progressive Czechs and the Ultramontane Slovaks, I was animated as much by dread of doing anything to weaken religion in the Republic as by my desire to preserve its political unity. In the end the feud between Rome and Prague, which had lasted five hundred years, was finished, and I foiled an attempt of the Hungarians and Poles to destroy the State by using the Slovak Catholics against the Czechs.

Negotiations with the Vatican lasted from 1920 to 1927; it was a difficult task.

The *Modus Vivendi* owed most to Cardinal Gaspari. When I discussed John Hus with him I always talked very frankly. He was a slightly cynical man with a touch of Balfour about him, and, like Balfour, he was a very cultured man. I said to him: "We cannot abandon the celebration of John Hus; on the other hand, I know that you cannot accept the celebration, and somehow we must reach a settlement; how can it be done?" He replied: "Well, Mr Minister, in politics, unlike religion, a compromise is always possible."

At that time Cardinal Gaspari had something wrong with his right eye, and he was wearing an eye-shade. He said: "Mr Minister, I cannot see with my right eye at the moment, which makes my other eye rather tired, and so I often have to close my other eye for a few minutes. During that time, you will do something in Prague about John Hus, and when it is all over I shall open my second eye and everything will be settled."

We compromised in the end by declaring the day of John Hus a national holiday but not a State holiday. Thus it was settled, and the celebrations took place while the Cardinal had his eye covered, and afterwards we never returned to the matter.

Throughout the negotiations I understood that there were always two parties of opinion about me at the Vatican: one side believed that I desired an enlightened policy, the other that such a policy was only camouflage of my fundamental hostility towards the Church. I am informed this is still the case to-day.

There was a certain sympathy between the last Pope, Pius XI, and myself, although I did not know him personally. When the fight with Hitler began he sent me messages of sympathy. I always believed



CZECH COASTAL COMMAND CREW 'AT THE READY'

Waiting for the signal to take off for an operational flight.



THE PRESIDENT'S FIRST PUBLIC SPEECH AFTER HIS RETURN

In front of the battered Town Hall of Prague.
From the official Czech colour film *Return to Prague*.

Pope Pius XI understood my policy and recognized my sincerity. Certainly, between 1931 and 1938 relations between the Vatican and Czechoslovakia were always friendly. When Masaryk resigned and the question of a new President was under consideration, it was generally believed by Catholic deputies in Czechoslovakia that the Pope favoured my election as President. Anyway, the result of the election was that all Catholics, including even those Slovaks who afterwards turned quisling, supported me against candidates of the Right.

I have never changed, and I never shall change my attitude in this matter.

MACKENZIE: The middle road may be wide, but it makes very rough walking sometimes, doesn't it? Have you given any assurances about the future to the Vatican?

BENEŠ: During the present war I have sent the Pope two memoranda affirming that after the war Czechoslovakia will continue my previous policy. I feel that the Treaty signed in 1927 is merely dormant and that it can be immediately put into effect again when the pre-Munich Czechoslovakia is reconstituted. These memoranda were sent to Pope Pius XII through Mr Roosevelt and the British Minister at the Vatican. I received no direct acknowledgment, but at present there are no diplomatic relations between the Czechoslovak Government and the Vatican, which has recognized the quisling state of Slovakia.¹ However, no Nuncio has been nominated, and the only representative is a minor official who talks freely to Slovaks of the Czechoslovakia of the future.

I believe the intention is to avoid anything which would constitute a fundamental difficulty in any future relations and that these will be duly re-established.

MACKENZIE: What is the attitude of the Archbishop of Prague?

BENEŠ: Cardinal Kašpar is dead, and after his death I sent a letter to the Vatican, asking them not to nominate a new Archbishop during the war because any nominee now would be, or at any rate would seem to be, somebody imposed by the Germans. It would mean that when we returned we should have to banish him. I sent this letter to the Vatican through Mgr Godfrey, and I received through him an official reply in which the Vatican agreed to my request. There is therefore no Archbishop of Prague at the present time. Since the death of Cardinal Kašpar two other bishops have died and no new nominees have been made.

¹ This was in 1944.

MACKENZIE: What about Ruthenia? Is Ruthenia to have autonomy?

BENEŠ: We took Ruthenia on trust after the last war. We consider it necessary that Ruthenia should be formally restored to us because it was included in our pre-Munich frontiers, but, at the same time, if the sub-Carpathian Ruthenians decide to unite with the Soviet Ruthenians (Ukrainians) we shall not oppose it. We merely demand the moral satisfaction of being consulted first. We never did consider that sub-Carpathian Ruthenia was our concern, but if, after the First World War, they had been given to Poland or remained under Hungary they would have lost their nationality and their national culture. This we preserved for them. We feel we have finished our duty towards them, and we are content that they should join the present Ukraine.

MACKENZIE: Mr President, I am going to ask you a direct question. If at this moment you were Prime Minister of Poland what would you do?

BENEŠ: Well, if at this moment I were in such a responsible position in Poland I certainly should not delay. All political questions have two possible solutions: one a temporary solution dictated by the circumstances of the moment, and the other a final solution. That applies to Ruthenia. For twenty years we have settled the Ruthenian question temporarily, but the final settlement can only be union with the Soviets.

Similarly I consider the final settlement with Slovakia to be union with the Czechs.

Poland has to reach a final settlement with Russia. The Polish question could have been settled temporarily a year ago, and a frontier could have been drawn up which would have been better for them than the Riga frontier and the Curzon Line, but, in my opinion, the ultimate solution can only be somewhere about the Curzon Line. A year ago they could have got better terms, but now I think a temporary agreement is out of the question. If I were the Prime Minister of Poland I should try to obtain a permanent solution by giving the territory of Byelo-Russia and Polish-Ukraine to the Russians and keeping everything on the other side for the Poles. I should try to settle it with Stalin on similar lines to those on which I settled with Grabski over Těšín in 1920. The question of Těšín was similar to that of Lwow. This is what I did. I said to the Poles: "You wish to retain the city; our people also want it. Don't let us quarrel about the division. You keep the real Těšín which is on the right side of the river Olza. On the left side of the river there is no city, but there is a bridge and the frontier will be determined by the river. From the few

houses on the left bank of the river I shall convince our people that we can construct a Czech Těšín."

This temporarily provided a solution which was accepted at the time as ingenious. Fifteen years later Beck was considering it a monstrous injustice.

If I were the Polish Prime Minister I should try to do the same kind of thing for Lwow and convince my people that we had made a reasonable and acceptable compromise. However, it is probably too late to do that now, and I would accept the Curzon Line as the final decision.

There must be a final settlement between the Poles and the Russians, and therefore I should accept a transference of populations.

MACKENZIE: Now that we have started talking about the complications which come from cities of one nationality with the countryside of another let us talk about the Sudeten Germans. What is going to happen to them?

BENEŠ: There is a theoretical side to that question and a practical one. Theoretically Czechoslovakia was established in 1918 as a country of several nationalities. This was unavoidable because the historical frontier was dictated by the natural formation of the country, and this was to be maintained. Without that frontier of mountains Czechoslovakia would have been strategically indefensible. This meant that a certain number of Germans in Moravia and Bohemia and of Magyars in Slovakia would have to be included. The Poles constituted a very much smaller percentage of the mixed population. If we had tried to establish an independent Czechoslovakia without certain districts preponderantly German and Magyar, it would have been so impoverished economically that it could not have continued as an independent State, which was evident to all after Munich. Therefore Masaryk and I decided to try to build up a State of several nationalities. We would apply democracy and thus establish a common economic and social interest. We would try to show that the idea of nationality developed since the nineteenth century as the heritage of the French Revolution was not the only basis on which you could create a State. We would have, like Austria-Hungary, a State of several nationalities. Such a State might have endured if the Habsburgs had ordered such a State with justice to all its component parts. We would try to profit by the failure of Austria-Hungary. That was the idea of Masaryk and myself, and to a very large degree we succeeded in giving that idea practical expression, for Czechoslovakia was one of the best democracies of Europe, certainly the best of all the so-called "succession states." The

Germans had complete cultural liberty; they had proportionately more State schools than the Czechs themselves, a privilege inherited from the old Austria. In order not to trespass upon their cultural life we decided to develop ourselves in order to reach the same level. We succeeded, and by 1930 there was almost complete equality. Equality in law, equality in constitution, equality in language. I do not say it was perfect, but it was well within reach of perfection.

With the arrival of Hitler on the scene, the Germans began to be discontented. From the very beginning there had always been a section which never acknowledged the Republic's existence, but these were not more than a quarter of the whole. They were filled with German ideas and perfectly convinced of German superiority. Gradually, however, the last war was forgotten, and at the time when Hitler gained power it would not be an exaggeration to claim that about two-thirds of the German population supported the Czechoslovak Republic and apparently had no desire to leave it.

The German population represented 22 per cent. of the whole, but among the officials there were only about 14-16 per cent. of Germans, and the Germans asked that this should be increased to 22 per cent. I considered this claim was justified and when I was elected President I made it part of my programme to establish this equality. However, the rapid development of Hitlerism stopped everything and the Germans at once became aggressive.

The more noise Hitler made, the more anti-Czech the Germans became. In spite of that I tried to develop democracy, but the more democracy I offered, the more anti-democratic the German population became, until finally the agitation, deliberately fomented by the Nazis, brought about Munich. When that agreement was concluded we were given conditions under which we were first of all deprived of territories without which we could not exist economically; secondly, democracy was destroyed; and finally we were deprived of the possibility of even pretending to live as an independent State. I went to the limit in the way of concessions; but the Western democracies forced me to allow a totalitarian minority in a democratic State, which was ridiculous.

Finally Hitler gave the whole State to that minority of three million Germans with only the mildest protests from the British and French Governments, which had guaranteed the independence of Czechoslovakia. When these Germans had destroyed everything during this war the conclusion was that the two nations could not live together. So, you see, the problem of the Sudeten Germans was created by the

Sudeten Germans themselves at a time when they thought they would always be in a position to solve it for themselves.

MACKENZIE: How is the problem to be solved practically?

BENEŠ: I am afraid I do not believe in this talk about re-educating the Germans. When the Germans have been beaten they will feel very sorry for themselves, and none of them will want to go to war again immediately, but the idea of racial superiority is so deeply ingrained in every German that it will take generations to eradicate it, and so long as that belief in superiority remains, so long will the Germans contemplate war in order to prove it. We Czechs realize that we cannot live with Germans. On the other hand, we cannot afford economically or strategically to give them any of the territory into which they have infiltrated through the centuries. I am convinced that every Sudeten German who was not actively opposed to Nazism must go, and go immediately, when Czechoslovakia is re-established as a Republic. If these Germans remain it can only mean permanent civil war between them and the Czechs.

About one million Czechs live among the three million Germans in the Germanic settlements of Czechoslovakia. These Czechs will fight. The other Czechs will rally to help them and after what Czechoslovakia has suffered since Munich the prospect of civil war is intolerable. The only solution is transfer to Germany. I have discussed this transfer in detail with Mr Churchill and Mr Eden. The British War Cabinet has accepted this transfer, and they have already officially notified me that they are in favour of it. I have discussed it with Stalin and with Molotov. I have given them a detailed memorandum on the subject, and they have accepted it. I discussed it with Mr Roosevelt in 1943. He told me: "You will have no difficulties from our side. Go right on and prepare it." The Labour Party has accepted the idea. I have discussed this proposed transfer with many people in Britain, and although some are against it, my impression is that the majority accept it as a necessity.¹

MACKENZIE: Dr Beneš, a Polish friend of mine has given me four questions; I wonder if you would care to answer them.

BENEŠ: With pleasure.

MACKENZIE: This is the first question:

"During the inter-war years a Polish writer, F. B. Czarnomski, the

¹ In view of the apparent surprise with which a portion of the British Press received the news that the transfer of the German population of Czechoslovakia had already begun, it is worth noticing how clearly President Beneš knew his own mind on this subject in May 1944 and also how frankly he had expressed his intentions both officially and unofficially.

London Correspondent of the *Kurjer Warszawski*, advocated a union between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Do you think such a union desirable or possible of attainment in the future?"

BENEŠ: I have always considered an intimate collaboration, even some kind of federal union between Poland and Czechoslovakia an interesting question for the future. I tried to establish it several times after the First World War. I failed, not because we were against it but because Poland, practically ever since Pilsudski seized power, definitely opposed Czechoslovakia. If we really wish to stop the *Drang nach Osten* policy in the future there must be intimate collaboration and a kind of union between the Poles and the Czechoslovaks. This has always been in my political programme for the future, but I always intended to elaborate it step by step because of the many prejudices both of the Poles and Czechoslovaks which had to be overcome. They were outlined in my first talks with General Sikorski, and we exchanged a certain number of letters on this subject.

The Poles, on the other hand, were inclined to favour the establishment of such a federal union from the top, and I knew this could never be successfully imposed upon my own people like that.

Secondly, I made the achievement of such a union dependent on several conditions. It will be impossible without a settlement of outstanding differences between Russia and Poland, because a Czechoslovak-Polish union will be aimed at stopping German expansion. The Poles number about twenty million, the Czechs and Slovaks a little more than ten million. Thirty million people cannot stop the Germans. We must have Russia with us and without the intimate collaboration and friendship of Russia we can do nothing effective. Therefore, I say to the Poles, you must settle your question with Russia, as we did. Everything we arrange between us must be acceptable to Russia, otherwise we shall be powerless. If we do not come to an agreement with Russia after this war there will be a third war in which Czechoslovakia and Poland will both disappear, at any rate temporarily.

MACKENZIE: Here is the second question:

"The weakness of the international position of Poland and Czechoslovakia had its source in the German threat to both the Western Slav countries. Czechoslovakia's position became particularly difficult after the conquest of Silesia by Frederick the Great, just as Poland's position was compromised by the first partition when she was deprived of her access to the sea. By the seizure of Silesia, the territorial contiguity of Poland and Czechoslovakia was broken. Bohemia became encircled by Prussia. Do you think it would be desirable to restore the territorial

contiguity between the two Western Slav countries by pushing their frontiers westward, to run along the rivers Oder and Lusatian Nissa? This would involve the removal of about five to six million Germans, but as the Russians have already agreed to compensate Poland at the expense of Germany and as they are reliably reputed to be determined to remove ten to twelve million Germans into Russia, whom they would employ on the reconstruction of the country, do you not think that such a scheme would be practicable?"

BENEŠ: It may not be impossible, but I personally ask nothing for Czechoslovakia from Germany. If I were in the place of the Poles, I would cede small portions of territory here and there, but I know that the Poles would consider such a cession national treason and that no Polish politician could survive it. What could be done with those six million Germans is a difficult question to answer, but if it is answered it can only be answered with the collaboration of Russia. I must emphasize that Poland in this war has made one fundamental mistake. She can achieve her aims only with the help of Soviet Russia and the collaboration of the three great Powers. All three, I insist. None of the great Powers by itself will avail. I discuss every question of Czechoslovakia with the Russians, the British, and the Americans. I play with my cards on the table, and I do not push one power against another. The Poles too often take this line: they consider that they are strong enough to discuss the future as equals with equals. I learned long ago that the big nations always settle their questions among themselves at the expense of the small nations. I should like to see the Poles learn as much from experience as I have.

MACKENZIE: And now for question three:

"The Poles believe that the negotiations for a federal union between Poland and Czechoslovakia which were so auspiciously initiated in 1940 have been suspended since Russia entered the war, because of Russia's objection to them. Do you think there is still a chance of such a Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation if the Poles reach an understanding with Russia?"

BENEŠ: Emphatically. Although I have made a treaty with Russia, I have not abandoned my idea of an intimate collaboration with the Poles; but once again I repeat, without Russia's favour it is unimaginable. A Central European Federation cannot be created by the favour of Britain and America against the wishes of Russia. The real way to reach an agreement is for Poland to make some kind of alliance with Russia on the lines Czechoslovakia has, and then a tripartite pact against German aggression could be made.

MACKENZIE: Here is the last question:

"According to the Poles, the territorial questions at issue between Poland and Russia could be adjusted by mutual agreement. What the Poles are afraid of is that Russia will interfere in Poland's internal affairs and foster social unrest for the purpose of sovietizing Poland. Do the Czechs share those fears as far as their own country is concerned?"

BENEŠ: I do not share such a fear. The Russians are more intelligent than that. The Russians will gain more by having a small democratic Poland and Czechoslovakia as friendly neighbours if there is some reasonable agreement between them. If they try to sovietize them they will arouse British and American hostility. I cannot imagine Czechoslovakia and Poland being sovietized unless Germany and France were also sovietized: in other words, the whole European Continent. If that happens we shall never stop war. We shall at once start another one.

Russia is only interested in peace as soon as possible. She has made a treaty with Great Britain, and an economic agreement with America. She has already advised our Communists to be reasonable, and, in fact, our Communists are not so radical as our anti-Communists say. Our people would certainly oppose any policy which looked like trying to sovietize Czechoslovakia. I realize that if they really wished it they could do it by force of arms, so I prefer to have a treaty. It is always better to have a violated treaty than no treaty at all. The Russians have signed it and promised they will not interfere with Czechoslovakia's internal affairs. I have signed, and I shall be loyal. I have absolute confidence that the Russians will be equally loyal.

The trouble with the Poles has been that they never made provision in time for the Russians coming into the war. As far back as January 26th, 1941, Sikorski and I had a very frank talk. I said to him: "My dear General, we can discuss our intimate collaboration on one condition, which is that you must settle your questions and quarrels with Russia in time." "What do you mean?" he exclaimed. I replied: "First of all Russia will soon be in the war. Theoretically, Russia is at war already. She will beat the Germans, and we must face up to the fact that her armies will go through our territories, so we must settle our questions in time." "Do you really think they will go to war?" Sikorski asked in amazement. "Of course," I answered. "And on our side against Germany."

"Mr President," he said, "that would be a disaster."

"Well, my dear General," I replied, "we cannot be liberated without Russia. We cannot possibly win with the help of Britain alone." "I could never accept the Russian violation of Polish territory in 1939, Mr

President," said General Sikorski, "I am the Prime Minister of Poland 1939, and I cannot give up one inch of my territory. I remain the Prime Minister of 1939." Remembering that the Poland of 1939 included Těšín seized by the Poles after Munich, I replied (when General Sikorski suggested that we might give Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia to the Hungarians), "My dear General, you are Prime Minister of Poland 1939, I am President of Czechoslovakia 1938. That is my answer."

I had a great affection for Sikorski. He was perhaps too much a general and not enough a politician, but he was an honest man.

MACKENZIE: Tell me, Mr President, when the agreement was announced between Stalin and Hitler, were you prepared for it?

BENEŠ: I knew of it beforehand. When Litvinov resigned on May 1st, 1939, that was, for me, a sure sign of a change in Russian policy. They had based their previous policy on collective security. The occupation of Czechoslovakia made it clear that the next aggressive step of the Germans would be Eastward. The question for the Russians was whether it would be with the Poles against Russia or against the Poles first, and in either case what would be the reaction of Western Europe? The latter had realized their terrible blunder over Czechoslovakia, but the Russians were not convinced of this. Having seen Britain and France sacrifice a well-armed Czechoslovakia, they were surprised at a guarantee being given to Rumania and a badly armed Poland. They could not make head or tail of such a policy. However, they made one last attempt to negotiate with the Western Powers when my friend Mr William Strang was sent from Britain. The Russians had to decide whether to trade with Britain and France or with Germany, and they suspected the British of a lack of seriousness by sending an official instead of the Foreign Secretary himself.

During the discussions with Great Britain, the Russians were convinced that there was no intention on the part of Chamberlain to reach a serious agreement and that every effort would be made to involve Germany and Russia in war with each other for the benefit of the Western democracies. They decided that the guarantees to Rumania and Poland were a bluff. They were convinced that if Germany attacked Poland it would mean another Munich, with themselves attacked by Germany afterwards, and they urgently required time to prepare for what they knew was sooner or later the inevitable war with Germany. So they decided to make an agreement with Hitler.

Hitler's own plan was to attack Russia either after he had brought about an estrangement between Poland and the Western Powers, or,

if that proved impossible, after he had overwhelmed Poland and persuaded the Western Powers to accept the *fait accompli*. He never really expected to be landed with a war at all over Poland. The treaty was Hitler's own proposal.

I knew about the negotiations when I was in Chicago in June.

I was convinced that the war was near at hand. I discussed the future intimately with the Soviet Minister in Washington, telling him what I knew. He was extremely cautious in committing himself, but he realized from the discussion that I was convinced Hitler would attack Poland any time after July 15th in that year and that Russia should be prepared for that and be sure that she was not attacked at the same time. In point of fact, the Germans were convinced the Russians would never intervene and that the Western Powers would surrender to their usual *laissez-faire* over Poland. So, too, were the Russians, particularly after the Franco-British proposals to them, in the course of which the Russian point of view was rejected, the Russians' conditions being that they must have military bases in the Baltic States and that Poland must be willing to allow the Russian armies through her territory. This the Poles refused.

The party in power in Poland was now convinced that Germany would not attack them for the time being. Even three days before the attack started Beck was declaring there would be no war. The Russians, not yet sufficiently prepared, decided to buy time. As I say, I had known of the likelihood of the Russian-German agreement since May-June of 1939; on July 18th I reached this country from America. I knew all about the course of negotiations between Berlin and Moscow. The treaty was decided upon between the first and fourth of August. I had detailed reports of the discussions in Berlin between the General Staff and the Nazi heads. Hitler was in Berchtesgaden and participated by telephone at the crucial meeting at which the whole business was finally decided by the German General Staff. I had that information in England on August 12th.

On August 21st I had been invited to lunch with Maisky. That morning telegrams came from Moscow to say Ribbentrop had arrived there. I said: "Very big news; this means that in one week we shall have the war." Maisky did not believe it.

I had already received from Prague information about the movement of German troops. The treaty between Germany and Soviet Russia was signed on August 23rd, and on August 27th the attack began. The Polish frontier was crossed on the evening of that day, although it was announced as September 1st. I had told Maisky at our lunch

that in my opinion the treaty meant war, but he was sure it was only the prelude of another Munich by the Western democracies. The Russians had been positive that it would be another Munich, and they had considered nothing except the paramount necessity for themselves to prepare for the war that Germany would inevitably declare upon them later on.

MACKENZIE: I gather from what you told General Sikorski as early as January 1941 that it was not merely prognostication based on wishful thinking which led you to express so confidently your opinion that Germany would attack Russia?

BENEŠ: I knew the Germans had been preparing throughout the winter and by February I knew many of the details of the plan for the attack on Russia, which originally had been timed to start as soon as possible after April 1st. However, the complete surprise of the Yugoslav revolution on March 27th on top of the Greek's splendid resistance to Mussolini was too much for them. They had counted on the surrender of the Greeks and the ability of the Prince Regent of Yugoslavia to make the signature of the pact effective.

The decision of the British High Command to divert troops from North Africa to Greece, and thus compel Hitler to divert German troops from the proposed Russian attack in order to protect his southern flank, made postponement inevitable, and, with an optimism which was not warranted, the attack on Russia was postponed until May 1st. The state of preparation for the commencement of the war was again postponed until May 15th, and the date went on being postponed until June 22nd.

MACKENZIE: After what you have just told me I feel more convinced than ever that the historians will consider the decisive battle of this war to be the second Marathon that was fought by six thousand Evzones when, on the night of November 8th-9th, 1940, the Italians' attempt to break through to the Plain of Thessaly was foiled. In my opinion those six thousand Greeks saved Moscow. If the Germans had been able to launch their attack on Russia on April 1st, 1941, I do not believe for one moment that Moscow would have survived.

BENEŠ: I never believed the Germans would get to Moscow, although I knew they would penetrate deep into Russia. Knowing the quality of the Russian armies, I never doubted that they would be stopped somewhere.

MACKENZIE: Yes, but suppose, instead of getting within striking distance of Moscow by December 6th and being defeated not only by Russian valour and strategical skill but also by their own failure

to prepare for a winter campaign—suppose, I say, they had reached the same point by September 6th—can we seriously believe Moscow would have been able to hold out?

BENEŠ: Well, I will admit that the delay did help. In fact, I think it did more than help, I think it may have determined in some degree the ultimate result of the war.

MACKENZIE: By the way, is it really true that the Russians, who must have had opportunities to note what was brewing in Germany, did not believe that they would be attacked?

BENEŠ: I discussed it with Mr Churchill as early as April 17th, giving him details of all the information I had, and he believed in the attack. On the other hand, he wondered if the Russians would resist. He was rather surprised by my optimism. However, the Russians were so anxious to gain another year for their preparations that they had been scrupulously careful to keep their agreement with the Germans.

In mid-June information reaching me from Berlin convinced me that the moment was at hand. The newspapers were already full of accounts of the massing of German troops in the East.

MACKENZIE: Is there any truth in the gossip that the Russians made a mess of the Finnish War at the beginning in order to deceive the Germans about their military strength?

BENEŠ: None whatever. My impression is that the Russians were taken aback by the strong resistance of the Finns and began to wonder if they had not received secret encouragement from the Germans. Then when they were ejected from the League of Nations they thought it was the Allies who meant to help the Finns, which from their point of view would mean helping Germany and that Finland would be made an excuse for the Allies and Germans to come to terms and attack themselves (the Russians). In any case at that time Daladier had a plan to get out of war in a similar way.

MACKENZIE: I begin to realize why you attach so much importance to the need of a clearing-house for Western and Eastern ideas, for I expect with your famous optimism you suppose that West and East can be brought to a condition of permanent mutual understanding.

BENEŠ: I certainly do.

Since those talks mostly in May 1944 I have been given a great deal of authoritative information about the activities of President Beneš during the war, the substance of some of which I propose to present in the first person.

Here is the President's own account of the Czechoslovak treaty with Russia:

BENEŠ: Preparations for the two important journeys to the United States and to Russia were synchronized. The journey to Moscow was intended to be the final step on the long political journey towards the complete reconstitution of the Czechoslovak Republic. It was to be an act of diplomacy which would round off our political campaign for co-operation during the Second World War. I believe that historians will regard this journey to Moscow as the logical culmination of all the journeys and missions of Czechoslovak political leaders in the past from 1848 to 1867 to the first years of the twentieth century. I believe that this journey of mine to Russia in December 1943 will be accounted the complement of that visit of Masaryk to Russia which had such tremendous consequences during the First World War. I believe that Masaryk himself, were he alive, would regard my journey to Moscow as the crown of his own life's work.

That visit to Moscow must be seen in its close relationship with the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty of 1935 against a possible renewal of German imperialism. The moment that Russia entered the present war, I got ready a plan to renew that treaty of 1935 and to negotiate and conclude such a new treaty before the Second World War should end.

On June 1941 I declared that Czechoslovakia would resume diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia at the point where they were broken off after Munich. In negotiating with other countries, even before 1941, I had always taken the line that previous Czechoslovak-Soviet arrangements should be respected, because from the very beginning of the Second World War I believed in and, indeed, depended for my conviction of ultimate victory upon Russia's entering the war against Germany.

My attitude during the Czechoslovak negotiations with Poland was always made clear in order to avoid any future misunderstanding with Russia. My colleagues and myself were always loyal towards Russia, and we never failed to keep all our allies informed of our efforts, which were inspired by the wish to preserve for all time a good understanding with Russia. Whenever Central European problems were the subject of settlements or diplomatic talks, we kept our future relations with Russia in the foreground. I pointed this out in my speech to the Czechoslovak State Council on November 12th, 1942, with particular clarity, bearing in mind as I was the Polish-Czechoslovak declaration of November 11th, 1940. I said I believed the present war was a decisive

and historic chance for the final stemming of the Pan-Germanic *Drang nach Osten* and that the present war had proved the necessity that Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union should co-operate in real friendship and with mutual loyalty. I insisted that full agreement between Poland and the Soviet Union was to come first and that all three of us should agree upon common action aiming at the final liquidation of the bloodthirsty *Drang nach Osten*.

On July 18th, 1941, the first Treaty of Alliance between Czechoslovakia and Soviet Russia was signed to last for the duration of the Second World War only. It bears the signature of Ivan Maisky and Jan Masaryk. I already envisaged a more durable formula which would conform with Czechoslovakia's foreign policy since 1935. I felt, however, that the final agreement would have been premature then. Neither Russia nor Britain (nor any other allied country) was anxious to go so far as that.

In 1942 the situation was improving. When I was preparing for my journey to the United States I decided to try to deal with the Czechoslovak-Soviet problem as well. I had always known that disasters like Munich could happen only when there was a difference of opinion between West and East. It was clear that victory in the Second World War depended on the removal of any sources of tension and misunderstanding between the West and the Soviet Union. Czechoslovakia was vitally interested in seeing this atmosphere cleared. Hitler's act of aggression against Russia had been based on the assumption that the split between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world might make it possible to come to an understanding with the West and agree upon some form of peace which would give him a free hand against the Soviets.

I believed that such a catastrophe could be prevented only by a sincere agreement between the Anglo-Saxon nations and Soviet Russia. I believed that it was one of the tasks of Czechoslovakia to collaborate for the building up of such an agreement, and during the war to find within the framework of such an agreement the obvious and internationally important place for a special agreement between Czechoslovakia and Russia.

While I was in America I intended to work for a closer *rapprochement* with Russia and through it to bring about a speedy victory over Hitler. I was anxious, moreover, to be clear about future Soviet policy and to know what Russia's political intentions were after the war and particularly what her policy was to be regarding the internal affairs of her neighbour States. I was aiming at a full understanding between

Czechoslovakia and the Soviet because I believed that such an understanding would be a good example to show the United States and that it would help American statesmen to realize how essential an understanding with Russia was to them and to the whole world.

I wanted to remove the suspicions between the Great Powers and help to establish that atmosphere of goodwill and co-operation which was to prove so important and effective in the great conference at Teheran.

Long before I could visit the United States I started conversations with Bogomolov, the Soviet ambassador to Czechoslovakia in London, as early as January 1943, and in the following March I put before him the trend of Czechoslovak policy all round.

In spite of the fact that Czechoslovakia's negotiations with the Poles were broken off, I never dropped the idea and the hope that Czechoslovakia and Russia would in the end reach an understanding with Poland during or after the war.

Before leaving for America I put a set of decisive questions to Bogomolov, making it clear that London and Washington would have to know in advance how far Czechoslovakia wanted to go in negotiating with Russia and Poland.

Moscow's reply arrived in April, and Bogomolov brought it to Aston Abbots personally. He appeared pleased, moved, and even excited when he arrived, and he obviously felt that his own part in these negotiations had been a personal success for himself. Moscow's answer was positive and favourable in all essential questions, and Bogomolov emphasized that the Soviet attitude promised well for the future.

Here is the substance of Moscow's reply:

Dr Beneš should send to Moscow a complete draft of a treaty after discussion with Bogomolov. The draft should contain a clause embodying the idea of non-interference with internal affairs. The Soviet did not object to post-war co-operation with Poland as envisaged by the Czechoslovak Government. With regard to Germany, Moscow was unable for the time being to express her point of view in detail. The intention was to finish the war with Germany, but when it came to details Russia would be shaping her own attitude towards Germany to accord with British and American views. Dr Beneš would be kept informed, and while the Soviets did not say no to Czechoslovakia's claim to transfer the German population, no definite and final formula could be started at the present moment.

About the middle of May Bogomolov informed Dr Ripka that with regard to Germany he could say no more than what was already known but that Russia agreed to the transfer of the German Nazi

population from Czechoslovakia and asked Ripka to cable this message immediately to me in Washington.

The British Government had been kept informed of the negotiations with Soviet Russia. Jan Masaryk and Ripka had taken part in the conversations with Bogomolov. During my stay in Washington I informed Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, and Sumner Welles personally of these negotiations.

I had planned to visit Moscow in the summer of 1943 after my return from America, but after many discussions between London, Washington, Moscow, and the Czechoslovak Government in London the journey to Russia had to be postponed. Washington fully appreciated Czechoslovak policy towards Soviet Russia. Mr Roosevelt, Mr Cordell Hull, and Mr Sumner Welles were in full agreement with my point of view. They welcomed the proposed treaty as an example for all the other neighbours of Russia, and they commended the Czechoslovak formula for safeguarding full independence respecting the internal affairs of the country and its social structure.

London's reactions were different. Mr Churchill himself was inclined to approve Czechoslovakia's action, but inside the Foreign Office there were two schools of opinion. Some agreed, others were afraid that Czechoslovakia was heading too far eastward alongside Russia "to the detriment of the Poles," who would feel themselves isolated in their attitude towards Russia and in their efforts to solve the territorial problem on the basis of the Curzon Line. The majority of the Poles were opposed to Czechoslovak-Russian policy only because they thought it would spoil their plan of creating a federated Central Europe under Poland's leadership as a barrier not only against Germany but also Soviet Russia.

I saw Mr Eden three times between June and November 1943. Masaryk, Ripka, Strang, and Nichols were present at these lengthy conferences during which the complex subject of Czechoslovak-Soviet relations was discussed. Mr Eden supported the view of those in the Foreign Office who did not oppose the treaty in principle and did not object to my journey to Moscow. Indeed, Mr Eden thought that public opinion in Great Britain would welcome my visit to Moscow and support a treaty of alliance between the two countries. On the other hand, he felt that I should not sign the treaty now but wait until the armistice with Germany.

I disagreed with Mr Eden's point of view. I mentioned that the Czechoslovak-Soviet negotiations would provide a test case of Soviet Russia's real intentions after the war. I argued that it would serve the

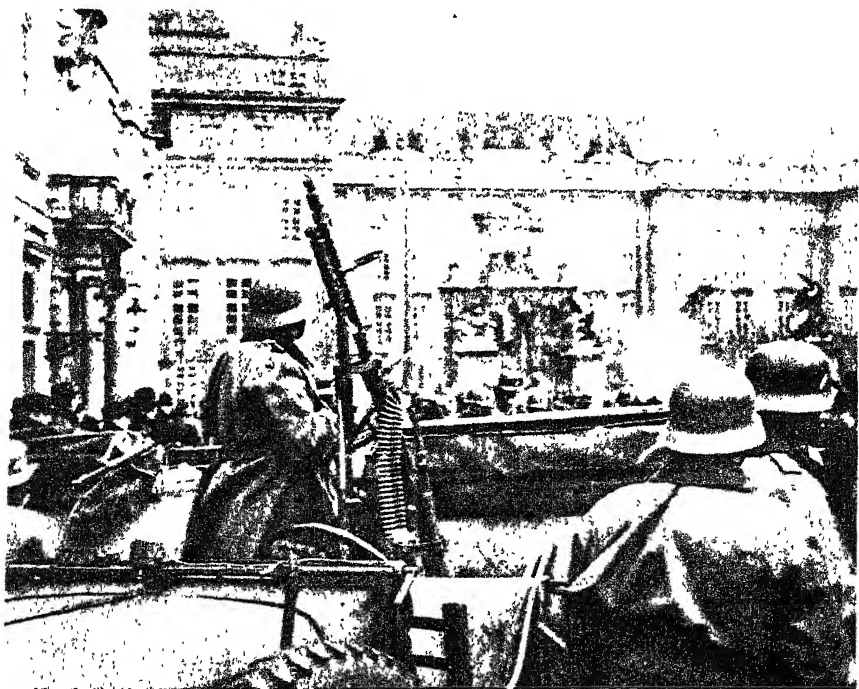


SEPTEMBER 1938

Mr Neville Chamberlain, the British Premier, arrives at an airfield near Godesberg for a talk with the Führer. He is met by Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister.



THE OCCUPATION IN MARCH 1939
First German patrols arrive at the gates of the city of Prague.



IN THE CENTRE OF THE CAPITAL
The German troops take possession of the Presidential residence.



THE GERMANS TAKE OVER
The main entrance to the Czechoslovak Chancellery.



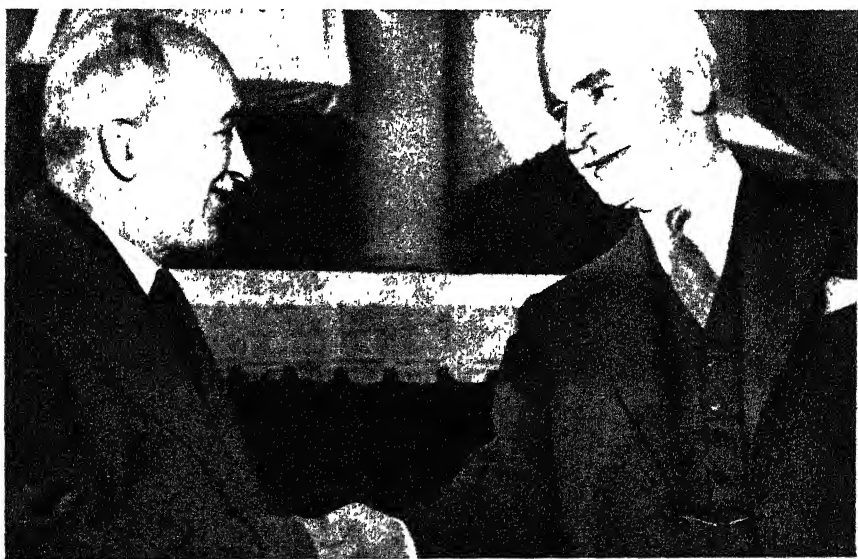
DR EMIL HÁCHA

President of the Second Republic after the resignation of Dr Beneš, and later on the nominal State President of the so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.



DR. BENEŠ AND BRITAIN'S AMBASSADOR

Mr Philip Nichols was British Minister to the Czechoslovak Government in London during the war, and now carries on in Prague as doyen of the Diplomatic Corps.



WASHINGTON, 1943

Cordell Hull, U.S.A. Secretary of State, welcomes President Beneš at the White House.



TWO PRESIDENTS

President Beneš and President Roosevelt at the White House in Washington.



A FESTIVE RECEPTION AT THE TOWN HALL IN NEW YORK
President Beneš thanks Mayor F. LaGuardia for his address.



THE CZECHOSLOVAK ARMY IN BRITAIN
Mr Winston Churchill, Britain's great War leader, and President Beneš taking the salute.



NEW YORK, MAY 1943
A portrait of President Benes taken during his stay in the U.S.A.

interest of all the Allies as well as of Czechoslovakia to show the world the true meaning of the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty. I insisted that this document would prove what Russia was aiming at and would be an indication of the line her post-war policy would follow. To me it appeared the first step towards bringing together all the Allies, because in such a treaty Soviet Russia would be clarifying her intentions now and after the war. I have been interviewed so many times on the subject of Russian sincerity, and my answer has always been that I take the fulfilment of Russia's promises for granted and that I have no reason to doubt Russia's attitude now or in the future.

At the start of our talks with the British Government I found a considerable gulf between the two schools of opinion, but I never had any impression that Great Britain objected in principle to the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty. According to the British representatives, the only issue was the time when such a treaty should be signed, and there was a definite desire to postpone that signature until a later date. On the other hand, Soviet Russia made it a condition that after the final draft had been approved in Moscow I was to go there and sign the treaty immediately. It became clear to me that the British Government and Mr Eden personally were still uncertain about possible sources of conflict between Great Britain and the Soviet Union in their mutual post-war relations. They feared that the discussions over the Czechoslovak-Soviet negotiations were an indicator of these possible difficulties. They felt that there should be a thorough investigation of the character and extent of any possible differences in the future, and that before Czechoslovakia did anything harmony of opinion should be established between Great Britain, the United States, and Soviet Russia in regard to the main problems of a common policy in war and peace. This uncertainty led directly to the Moscow Conference of the three Allied Foreign Secretaries in October 1943, and that was followed by the Teheran Conference between Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin in December of the same year. I feel justified in believing that the negotiations of the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty helped to speed up this conference.

In September 1943 Mr Eden asked me to go to Moscow after the meeting between Cordell Hull, Molotov, and himself. He expected the clearing up of all problems by co-operation between the three Great Powers, and he hoped that nothing would stand in the way of the proposed Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty. I immediately gave an undertaking to Mr Eden that I would do this and at the same time I asked Molotov to show the draft of the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty to his

British and American colleagues. This Molotov did, and Mr Cordell Hull and Mr Eden both expressed their satisfaction at the drafted terms of the treaty.

Shortly after the Moscow Conference I set out on my journey to Russia, and I think I can claim that this journey was one of the few outstanding events of international diplomacy during 1943 and that it did have an indisputable influence on the general development of inter-Allied relations. It was gratifying to know that the reactions in Berlin showed grave signs of uneasiness and insecurity. That year of 1943 was not only a turning-point in military affairs, it also brought about to some extent a change in the ideology of the war and a clarification of the future intentions of the combatants.

While the military situation was still obscure the Allies were chary of expressing clear views about aims which still remained visions. During 1943 it became more obvious than ever that total victory over Germany could never be achieved without the contribution of Russia to such a victory. Until the end of 1942 Allied ideology had been mainly based on the Atlantic Charter and the British-Soviet treaty. The two documents were not explicit enough to deal with the problems of everyday war policy, so many of which urgently required solution for the practical purpose of getting on with the war. All the conferences held in 1943 were guided by Allied victories on the field of battle. With the advance of the Allied armies and new successes on the various war fronts political decisions were taking a new shape. The whole strategy of political and military campaigns was undergoing a change, and yet, in spite of those conferences, when a critical event like Mussolini's sudden fall happened, neither the military nor the political high command was ready to take advantage of it.

The Anglo-Saxon powers had no clear idea what they ought to do after the Fascist regime; there was no unity about Italy's new domestic policy. The Soviet Union took no active part in the Mediterranean campaign, and the two Western Allies had no share in the campaign on the Eastern front. Hence that wearisome bickering about the second front in the course of which neither East nor West seemed able to understand the other's difficulties. Only the German propaganda machine benefited. After Stalingrad the Germans knew that nothing could avert the catastrophic defeat of the Third Reich unless they could split the Western and Eastern Allies politically. At last the apparent divergence (played up by the German propagandists) began to affect the *moral* of the combatant nations, and the Allied leaders realized how vital it was to demonstrate to the whole world that East

and West were waging a common war by composing their differences and unifying their policies.

The important Moscow Conference between the three Foreign Secretaries was held between October 19th and 30th. It was complemented by the British-American-Chinese meeting at Cairo at the end of November and crowned by the historic meeting of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin in Teheran which lasted from November 28th to December 1st. As I told you, when Mr Eden returned from Moscow he informed me that nothing now stood in the way of my journey there or of my signing the treaty.

I left Great Britain on the night of November 23rd, 1943, and flew to Gibraltar, stopping at Tripoli and Egypt. I much enjoyed this long journey through the air and occupied my mind with meditating upon the history of the countries over which we flew. From Egypt we went on to Palestine, and, flying over the Dead Sea, Transjordan, and Irak, we reached Baghdad. It was at Baghdad that I began to discuss matters with Soviet representatives, for here I was met by Alexander Korneitchuk, Molotov's chief deputy in the Soviet Foreign Office.

Korneitchuk was later to become Foreign Secretary of the Ukraine Soviet Republic. He met me at the Habania aerodrome, accompanied by Fierlinger, the Czechoslovak Ambassador to Moscow. We were delayed for some time in the desert aerodrome of Habania because of the bad winter weather which was unfavourable for a flight across the Caucasus into Russia. The week we unexpectedly had to spend at this intermediate station was used to discuss problems which would be the subject of future Moscow talks, such problems as Hungary, Soviet Russia's Slavonic policy, Czechoslovak relations with the Ukraine, and in fact, the whole of our future policy with Soviet Russia.

Korneitchuk, whom I had already known as a good friend to my country, a cultivated writer and a great Ukrainian patriot, was most encouraging about the prospects in Moscow. He made notes of his talks with me and gave them to Stalin and Molotov in the form of a memorandum so that when the Moscow talks actually started the Soviet statesmen were already familiar with my main ideas.

At last the weather allowed us to leave Baghdad, and after a brief stop at Teheran we flew on to Baku. From there we spent four days in the train on our way to Moscow, passing through Caucasian districts with eloquent marks of the German war.

It had been a long and tedious journey, but it had been often lightened by the thrill of sensational sights and impressions, and it was always full of expectations.

The Treaty was signed on December 12th, 1943, by Molotov and Fierlinger. Kalinin, Stalin, Voroshilov, Korneitchuk, and myself were present. It was quite a ceremony. The ratification took place one day after the signature of the Treaty.

Besides many meetings with official representatives of the Soviet administration, I visited factories, military establishments, cultural centres, scientific institutes, libraries, theatres, and cinemas. I talked to workers, engineers, industrial managers, factory managers, simple soldiers, generals, politicians, diplomats, artists, university professors, and writers. I gained an interesting view of the work and life in Russia and met all kinds of people—a real cross-section of the population, men, women, and children.

I noticed that everybody and everything was concentrated on the war, on the battle fronts, on victory and post-war reconstruction. So far as Czechoslovakia was concerned there was a sincere, widely acclaimed, and deep-rooted sense of co-operation with the Czechs and Slovaks, and a real, almost a passionate, concern for a Slavonic understanding. Czechoslovakia was accepted everywhere as a fact, and everybody seemed anxious to build up a true and durable relationship between two States of kindred peoples. My journey to Russia will always remain close to my heart. I shall always remember it as a political journey made in quite exceptional circumstances and conditions. I feel that this journey will prove to be the most important I have ever made. I believe I gained a genuine inside look at life in the Soviet Union, and my own understanding of the Soviet Union was widened and deepened.

After I had met all the leading Soviet statesmen and had finished the main talks I sent back this report to London for Masaryk and the Czechoslovak Government:

“(1) All my political discussions and negotiations have, so far, been carried on in complete harmony, friendship, and cordiality. I have talked chiefly with Kalinin, Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov. Two meetings with Stalin on two nights, at which Kalinin and Molotov were present, were particularly important. There were also two meetings with Molotov devoted to political negotiations according to a prearranged programme of questions.

“(2) With Molotov we systematically discussed in principle every problem concerning our common policy—the post-war position of Germany and Hungary, the transfer of the German population, common frontiers, and co-operation in military and

economic affairs. The French, Yugo-Slav, Rumanian, Polish, and Austrian questions were also discussed; also the punishment of war criminals, and most importantly the form and character of the coming armistice as envisaged by the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty.

"A thorough study has been made of Slavonic policy in future and of the results of the two Allied conferences at Moscow and Teheran. Every single question has been repeatedly dealt with by myself in conference with Stalin, particularly the future of Germany and Hungary, the transfer of the German population, the Polish problem, and the Czechoslovak frontiers. Complete unity of opinion exists between Stalin and myself.

"(3) The result of all negotiations should be regarded as completely successful. Fierlinger participated in the discussions.

"(4) There has been a development of thought in Soviet Russia since my last visit in 1935 which is quite extraordinary. It is real progress. Yet it would be a mistake to regard things like the abolition of the International, the re-introduction of the Orthodox Church as an official organization, co-operation with the West, and Slavonic policy as mere tactics. The advance towards a new Russian empire, decentralized, with a solid and abiding place for the rest of the Soviet peoples imbued with the spirit of a new democracy seems an indisputable fact, and the Soviet Union, which will emerge from the war determined to apply and maintain the Soviet system in economic and social affairs, will be utterly new as a political force.

"Russia will take over the leadership of the Slavonic nations and will acquire for herself and all Slavonic countries a completely new and strong position in European and world politics. The Russians are strongly victory-minded, and they will show no mercy in dealing with Germany. Sympathy with Czechoslovakia is general and our political position seems very strong. The Treaty is regarded in Russia as the beginning of a new and important phase of political development between all the Slavonic peoples.

"(5) I submitted to the Soviet Government various plans for the transfer of the German population, and for economic and military co-operation, negotiations over which will be carried on with Moscow through the Czechoslovak Ambassador and our military representatives. In general we can say that our suggestions will be supported wholeheartedly by a true ally.

Our frontier problems are understood, and it may be expected that the Soviet Government will fully support the Czechoslovak point of view.

- “(6) I am convinced that a strict adherence to all treaties and agreements, not only with Czechoslovakia but also with Great Britain and the United States, can be expected with absolute confidence. What the Soviets promised to do and to support at the Moscow and Teheran conferences the Anglo-Saxons can take for granted. The Soviet Union feel that they have achieved the standing of a World Power, with full rights as such. They are proud at playing such a part and are unwilling to give it up.
- “(7) In the whole course of negotiations there was not one instance when the Soviet representatives did not emphasize at the appropriate moment that Czechoslovak home affairs did not concern them in any way and that they would never interfere.
- “(8) I had some long talks with our Communist deputies now in Russia, and I have confidence that during the transition period after Germany's defeat these deputies will join a united national front.

“I had important negotiations in Moscow about the Czechoslovak army on Soviet territory and its further development. These talks were held with Stalin and his staff in the Russian War Office. I took the opportunity to discuss frankly with Stalin the approaching day when the Soviet armies would enter Czechoslovakia. I realized that the circumstances in which this fact would happen ought to be discussed in advance and that clear decisions would have to be ready. True, in those days the Soviet Armies were still at Rostov, but I knew they would soon enter Polish territory and thence move westward across Czechoslovakia. I asked that when this happened Czechoslovak units should always march with the advancing Russian armies, to make the occupation of Czechoslovak territory a joint action, so far as the Czechoslovak Army could cope with the situation numerically, with the view of handing over Czechoslovak soil already repatriated to a Czechoslovak civil administration.

“Marshal Stalin approved of this plan without hesitation and promised it should be carried out in co-operation with the Czechoslovak military mission in Moscow: Later on agreement was reached and worked out in detail; a special military treaty was signed in London as a complementary agreement to the treaty between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.

"The proposed questions were discussed many times between me and the Soviet leaders. The talks on Poland were opened by Korneitchuk at Baghdad. Detailed discussions on Polish affairs took place at the official visit to the Bolshoi Teater (Grand Theatre) with Stalin, Kalinin, Molotov, Voroshilov, and Korneitchuk.

"The ballet *Sniegurotchka* was performed, and besides discussions during the very long intervals I stayed on at the end of the show for a long night of it in the company of my hosts, when in the lounge of the Government box we discussed the Polish problem in all its details. On this occasion the Soviet representatives asked me about conditions among the London Poles, and about whether an understanding with the London Poles could be reached. I told the Russian statesmen all I knew and insisted on two important things: (a) Czechoslovakia sincerely desired an agreement between Moscow and Warsaw. Any sort of dispute between the two peoples and countries damaged first of all Czechoslovakia. This was the case during the twenty years after the First World War and it contributed a great deal to the Munich treaty. That was why I had asked for the Polish Clause in the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty; (b) I said I was convinced that an agreement with the London Polish Government could be reached, at any rate with some of the chief members, even if it might be hopeless with others. The old followers of Pilsudsky would never agree with Moscow, but Mikolajczyk, the Prime Minister, and some of his supporters were sincere democrats and were convinced that co-operation with Moscow after the war was indispensable for Poland. I asked the Russian statesmen to try to reach an understanding with the London Poles. I told them how I met Mikolajczyk at Aston Abbots before I started on my journey to Moscow and how he had explained to me his point of view about the Polish-Soviet dispute. I received from him an impression that I was entitled to tell everything I knew about it to the Soviet officials in Moscow.

"Those talks at the theatre were most encouraging. The Soviet point of view was calm and impartial, and they really seemed to wish for a strong and independent Poland exactly as Stalin had said. However, they could never forget the trend of Polish foreign policy during the twenty years after the First World War, and they should not like to see it repeated.

"I managed to interest the Soviet leaders in my own point of view about the tripartite alliance, and I think I made a real impression on them. I urged them to renew diplomatic relations which had been broken after the Katyn incident and to let the London Poles know from Moscow the policy they were planning for Poland and

Czechoslovakia against Germany. I begged the Soviet statesmen to give the Poles an assurance like that given to Czechoslovakia on the subject of internal affairs and to try earnestly to reach an understanding.

"Before we left the theatre, Stalin made a précis of the whole discussion, summing up the main points with extreme clarity and producing a final formula of the Soviet attitude towards Poland. I asked if I could take this with me as a message from Moscow for Mikolajczyk, and Stalin gave me full authority to do so."

MACKENZIE: It was on your journey back, wasn't it, that you stayed for a while in the Azerbaijan Republic?

BENEŠ: Yes, when I left Moscow for London I went by train to Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, where I was to take the plane for Teheran; but we were held up by bad weather as we had been at the Habania aerodrome, on the way to Moscow. However, I thought it was a great opportunity to see at first hand something of the life of the three million people which make up one of the Federal Republics of the great Soviet Union. The President of the Republic placed his house at my disposal and I met all the leaders of the city of Baku, which is a great oil city of a million inhabitants. The whole system of extracting oil was explained to me, and I was much interested in seeing the construction of the oil wells, not only on land but also sometimes a considerable distance under the Caspian Sea. Hundreds of such wells had been erected all along the sea-coast with all the necessary instruments and machinery. I was really most deeply impressed. Among the officials I met were the President of the City Soviet, the Chief City Engineer responsible for the production of the oil, and the City architect. They were glad to entertain the President of a small country as their guest. They went out of their way to show me everything they could and told me with pride how much they had prospered in the Soviet Union.

"We have had our State, now, for the last twenty years. Before that, when we were under Czarist Russia, everything was in the hands of the Russians. Now the oil which we produce belongs to the State and the whole direction and organization is in our hands. We now have a national university, a technical school, a high school, hospitals—everything is in our hands. It is a national State and our whole culture is our own national culture. In the schools, we all learn the Russian language as the language of the Soviet Union, but all teaching is done in our own language. We have now several thousand national schools; we have our own doctors. Twenty years ago we had nothing; now the whole wealth of the country is in our hands."

They showed me round a metallurgical factory of 6000 workers. The director is an Azerbaijani, and the whole organization is in local hands.

They were most anxious also to show me some evidence of their culture. As luck would have it I arrived in Baku on a Monday, which is their day of rest, when no theatres or music-halls are allowed. However, the President of the Baku Municipality Soviet decided that something must be done about my entertainment and arranged a theatrical performance for that night.

MACKENZIE: No red tape in Azerbaijan!

BENEŠ: A Baku orchestra was hurriedly assembled and a ballet was performed with national dances in the intervals. Everything was done in Azerbaijani.

In its culture the Azerbaijan nation is like the Turkish and Armenian culture. It seems to have little affinity with the Georgian culture. The Azerbaijan people are closely akin to Armenian and there are six million of them altogether. Of these, three million are in Azerbaijan, but the other three are in Iran. This division has caused contention from time to time between Russia and Iran because the Persians suspect that when the Azerbaijanis are a little more advanced they will try to stir up agitation among the Azerbaijanis in Persia, either to form an independent Azerbaijan State there or to join with the Azerbaijanis in the Soviet Union.

The people of the Azerbaijan Republic are all content: their oil and their great factories will make them rich; they have a wonderful climate and, incredible though it may seem, their national fruit is the mandarin orange.

It was interesting to see how far their literature and language had been developed already. There were plenty of admirable school text books; they had translations of the Russian classics and even of all modern Soviet authors, published in good editions.

I came to the conclusion that this people, with their President, their national Parliament, their national theatre, their university, and their Press in the national language (using Turkish script), were as happy as any I had ever seen.

The Azerbaijanis in Iran have not been granted any kind of independent life; they have no national culture; they have no books; they have no Press; everything is Persian. Iran is afraid that the Russians have claims on their Azerbaijanis, but when Stalin was in Teheran he gave a solemn intimation of his good-neighbourly intentions and denied that Russia had any claims on Iran. The declaration at

the Teheran conference in favour of the independence and integrity of Iran was initiated by Stalin himself and when I was with the Shah he was delighted with the Russian attitude.

MACKENZIE: So you thoroughly enjoyed your stay in Azerbaijan?

BENEŠ: Indeed I did: they were four very interesting days.

MACKENZIE: And you were in the right mood to enjoy yourself after your success in Moscow?

BENEŠ: Oh, yes, I think I was feeling very pleased about everything.

And now with a picture in the mind of Dr Beneš waiting at Baku for the homeward plane, among oil wells and orange groves, his mind at ease about the future of his country, it is appropriate to see him at a moment when the whole of his life's work had been destroyed.

On October 1st, 1938, Marshal Goering officially notified Dr Mastný, the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin, that after Munich Germany could no longer accept Dr Beneš as President of the Czechoslovak Republic. He informed Dr Mastný that unless Dr Beneš resigned Germany would apply the Munich Agreement to Czechoslovakia with ruthlessness. Through unofficial channels the German intentions communicated to Prague were still more menacing in shape.

MACKENZIE: So you decided to resign?

BENEŠ: I wished to remain the symbol of anti-Nazi democracy, the political heir of Masaryk, and the uncompromising adversary of Hitler. Hitler himself accepted me as such when he made his speech in the Berlin Sports Palace. So, on October 5th, I notified in writing the new Government previously appointed by myself that I was going. Then I gave a formal broadcast to the people of Czechoslovakia. When I read through that speech to-day I think it was as discreet and cautious and temperate as the situation demanded. I appealed to my countrymen to remain calm and exercise a temporary constraint notwithstanding the catastrophe. I asked them to abstain from reproaches and from recriminations of other countries, and from quarrels among themselves and to keep their own self-confidence and their own faith in justice. I said that Munich was but a shadow of coming events; I intended to remain loyal to my own principles and to work for the nation elsewhere. I do not think there were many of my listeners who understood what my words meant because I was thinking of my plans for the war which I knew was certain.

Physically, I was utterly exhausted, a broken man with indescribable feelings in my heart and with grave thoughts in my head. Preoccupied with the terrible political and moral disruption which had overtaken

Europe and seemed likely to end in complete disintegration, I left the Castle of Prague on the afternoon of October 6th, 1938, for Sezimovo Ustí, my country house in Southern Bohemia. There I tried to recover from the blows dealt me by the events of the last few months. It had been my intention to remain in Czechoslovakia at least up to October 28th and then to go over to Switzerland or to England and from there to the United States; but the tension between Prague and Berlin was growing, and the Berlin Government notified Prague that so long as I stayed in Czechoslovakia Germany's plans for the future of our country could not be stated. The implication was that those plans would grow progressively harsher with every day that I remained, and the Prague Government, frightened by the prospect, pressed me to leave the country at the earliest possible moment. So, although my health was very bad, I decided to make things easier for the Government by leaving Czechoslovakia for London on October 22nd, 1938.

MACKENZIE: I cannot help remembering that departure of yours from Prague after the outbreak of the First World War. With what different feelings you must have set out nearly a quarter of a century later!

BENEŠ: Nevertheless, ill though I was on this second occasion, my only pre-occupation then was the same as it had been before—how our cause could best be served by the world war which I knew was coming. I told my personal and political friends to get ready at once with the necessary preparations in the resumption of the struggle. I told them that as soon as the Second World War started we should have to begin the same fight for independence as we had fought during the First War. We had to prepare a resistance organization at home, to establish contact with Western Europe, and to prepare an army at home and abroad for the struggle against Germany at the side of Western Europe because, in spite of the betrayal at Munich, Western Europe would have to fight Germany again. I said that a strong political body would be needed in exile and that many people would have to leave the country in good time because we should have to be ready by 1939 at the latest.

MACKENZIE: It was 1914 all over again.

BENEŠ: 1914 all over again, but more complicated and more difficult.

MACKENZIE: When did you expect the war to start?

BENEŠ: I thought it would start not later than May or June 1939. I was convinced that the conflict would be precipitated over Poland, and I expected that post-Munich Czechoslovakia (that is the Second Republic) would maintain its independence.

On the very day I reached London I came to an agreement with our ambassador, Jan Masaryk, about our co-operation. Contacts with him were immediately established. In the second half of November 1938 the first political messenger arrived from Prague. Couriers were arriving regularly right up to my departure to America in 1939 and, from the beginning, Colonel Kalla, our military attaché in London, was most helpful in this connexion.

I kept in touch with my political friends at home and wrote hundreds of letters in reply to their letters and enquiries, asking them to hold out, to keep their faith and not to surrender to despair because of Munich or because of what was happening inside the so-called Second Republic. My intention was to keep up the morale at home in the hope of avoiding the country's being caught by the outbreak of war in a state of moral disintegration.

MACKENZIE: I suppose you were perturbed by the course of events in Czechoslovakia, and you could hardly have helped being wounded by the attacks made upon you by your own countrymen?

BENEŠ: Well, some elements made me responsible for Munich and all its consequences. Grave accusations were levelled against me. It was so easy and convenient to make me the scapegoat. However, from the beginning I kept telling myself that the present was not the time to discuss who was guilty and who not guilty over Munich. I accepted the responsibility of it in silence and made up my mind to bear it with courage and patience until the time came when the future would allow an explanation. That is why I never protested, why I never defended myself, why I never reproached either the people at home or abroad and why I refrained from recriminations against Britain, France, Poland, and Yugoslavia.

I made it a rule never to get into contact with the new Czechoslovak Government over anything because I did not want to make their heavy task heavier, and I wanted, by keeping out of the way, to ease the difficulties at home and appease party quarrels. It seemed to me more advantageous for future developments to let all the blame fall upon my head for the time being. I intended to remain quiet until the war started and to spend my time preparing underground links with the homeland against the day war came.

MACKENZIE: Was Dr Hácha aware of your plans for the future?

BENEŠ: He must have been because Dr Lisický, who was Chargé d'Affaires at the Czechoslovak Legation in London, drew up a letter in the form of an interview with me and, after presenting it to me for revision, sent it to Dr Chvalkovský, who was the Foreign Minister of

the Czechoslovak Government in the Second Republic, and I know that Chvalkovský received that letter.

MACKENZIE: Would you care to give me the substance of that letter—that is, if you think it would be useful?

Here is the précis of a document which shows far-sighted statesmanship:

1. Dr Beneš adheres to the principle of keeping out of Czechoslovak internal affairs. He is keeping in contact with his personal friends and replying to letters as they reach him, but he has no intention of interfering with or taking the smallest part in internal politics. He would regard it as a complete misunderstanding of the present situation if in the present circumstances the different political parties and groups were to try to fight one another and launch even minor attacks. By all means let there be a division of political opinion between two parties because such a division helps to maintain the sympathy of Great Britain, France, and the United States for our cause. We shall need this sympathy if developments in Europe take a graver turn or the Great European War becomes imminent. The two camps must help each other on the general issue. Dr Beneš knows one object only—State and the interest of the State. *Salus reipublicae*. This must be our common problem.

2. Dr Beneš, therefore, decided to adopt the following principles:

(i) To resign his Presidency as soon as he saw such a step would serve the interests of the State. The same object occupies him in Great Britain, and he is determined to refrain from any political action which could bring about difficulties for the Second Republic in the international sphere. He is systematically refusing to make any public speeches, to give any interviews, to write any articles, or to deliver any lectures, and, for the time being, he will publish nothing that could be misused or abused by any against the interest of the State.

(ii) Dr Beneš's stay in Great Britain has nothing to do with politics. He is mainly occupied in the scientific research necessary to prepare for his post as a Professor of Chicago University, and with academic engagements at various American universities from whom he has received invitations to lecture on sociology. During the vacation in July he intends to return to London for some time and occupy himself entirely with the theoretical and scientific side of his new duties. The syllabus of Dr Beneš's American lectures is concerned with the development of democracy and with its problems between the end of the eighteenth century and to-day. Dr Beneš will restrict himself to the theoretical principles of democracy and will avoid touching upon the actual events of the day.

3. The international situation is Dr Beneš's constant pre-occupation, and he studies it with extreme care. He does not exclude the possibility of the outbreak of an acute crisis in the spring of 1939. On the other hand, observing the moral lethargy which seems to be gradually affecting wider and wider circles in the West, he does not discount the possibility of an international conflict being postponed by concessions to the totalitarian Powers. The war might start later in 1939 or even not until 1940. Indeed, the moral lethargy already mentioned might last for a couple of years. Nevertheless, whatever conciliation may achieve in postponing the war, Dr Beneš is convinced that war is finally absolutely inevitable. Any war which starts within the next two years will do so under conditions much less advantageous to the West than those of the autumn of 1938. The right policy for Czechoslovakia now is to use our neutrality to conserve our strength as much as possible. Dr Beneš excludes from his mind the possibility of a German victory in the coming war because he is convinced that the United States must intervene in such a war beside the Western Powers against Germany. A victory for those Western Powers is the only chance to secure European social consolidation and avoid complete disintegration of the social structure. We must not tolerate for a moment an illusion that Europe could tolerate German sway all over the Continent.

4. When war comes there must be no division of opinion and no different camps or parties inside the Czechoslovak nation. Neutrality must obviously be declared at once. What further steps we take will be decided by the course of the war. Any action taken by us abroad will have to be co-ordinated with the requirements of the nation's condition at home. In the case of war, Dr Beneš will refrain from undertaking anything which is not in full agreement with Prague.

5. Dr Beneš does not regard himself as a political emigré, and he does not exclude from his future plans a return to Czechoslovakia at any time he deems suitable. At the same time, he would only return with the consent of the Government, whose difficulties under present conditions he fully appreciates.

6. Dr Beneš urges the Czechoslovak Government not to place the slightest reliance on any sort of favour Germany may seem to offer Czechoslovakia. Nobody can trust Germany's word about her future plans anywhere, in Eastern, South-Eastern, or Central Europe. No general reconciliation or peace can be counted upon so long as dictatorships exist in Europe. Conflict must go on, and in view of internal and external German pressure, it is in the interest of the Czechoslovak Government and people to make no kind of move for the present but

to compromise and thus strengthen our ability to remain undefeated in the future and immune from a German abuse of any new situation which may shortly arise.

7. Dr Beneš believes that in any case, war or no war, the world is entering a period of political, social, and economic change no less radical than those caused by a world war. The majority of people in influential quarters in Great Britain and France are of the same opinion. Everywhere the future is anticipated with extreme anxiety. Those who expect dictatorships to fall through internal difficulties will be disappointed. Dr Beneš is convinced that the fall of such regimes, except through pressure of external circumstances, is out of the question.

8. Dr Beneš does not think that Czechoslovakia should be particularly depressed about the future. Depression about the future is prevalent in every European State whatever its regime. He does not expect any sort of pleasant surprise for Czechoslovakia in the future, nor is he dreaming of any miracle that will save the situation. He merely rests upon his conviction that, come what may, the State and people of Czechoslovakia will finally emerge from the present difficult situation.

Even if Czechoslovakia shall have to suffer hostile occupation, the ravages of war, or the social upheavals which follow war, she will rise again with strength renewed and injustice abolished. Dr Beneš believes that Czechoslovakia has attained her political majority and, so far as her social structure is concerned, she is better balanced and farther advanced than other countries and will require less time to recover. . . .

MACKENZIE: When you caused that letter to be sent to the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Hitler had not occupied Czechoslovakia?

BENEŠ: No, but the Berlin pressure after Munich and the apparent utter indifference of other countries to Czechoslovakia's fate had completely isolated the Government in Prague, and this was having a most gloomy influence on the feelings of the people. They felt that the rest of the world had abandoned them to the whims of the bandits of Berlin, and this sense of isolation was crushing to the spirit. After Munich the Prague Government had to seek some kind of *modus vivendi* with the Nazis. The leaders of the Prague Government did not believe that war was imminent, and they still hoped to avoid an occupation. Even I who had been through Munich did not suppose that the guarantee given to Czechoslovakia by the Western Powers was morally worthless; even I thought that Germany in her necessity would retain the pretence of respecting that guarantee. I never expected that the Germans would occupy Czechoslovakia by force until the beginning or on the eve of

war. Moreover, I believed that the war would start with the attack on Poland, and I hoped that Czechoslovakia would still be in a position to give a certain amount of help to Poland and her Western Allies. My intention was to devote all my work abroad to prepare against such an eventuality in order to be ready to enter into a Second World War against Germany as an ally. I hoped that it would be possible to get away part of our army into one of the neighbouring countries if we were invaded, and I believed that the Government would do what in fact in 1940 the Belgian, Dutch, and Norwegian Governments did.

From my work during the First World War I had learned what it means to have to start working for international recognition of a new and seemingly revolutionary Government and State, and I did not want to go through this ordeal again during a Second World War.

But all my assumptions and plans were upset by my failure to anticipate Hitler's action of March 14th, 1939, when he summoned Dr Hácha and Chvalkovský to Berlin, where under threats they allowed themselves to agree to the formation of a so-called Bohemian Protectorate and to the separation of all Slovak territory from the Republic. Dr Hácha was guilty too in signing such a document.

Before Hitler started his pretence of negotiating with Dr Hácha the German army had already started to invade Czechoslovakia, which was by that time defenceless. Tiso, the Slovak quisling, had already prepared the betrayal of the Republic in an interview with Hitler and was putting into effect a plot which had been going on between the Slovak separatist leaders and the Nazis from the previous autumn.

MACKENZIE: Do you think Chamberlain or any members of the British Government knew in advance about Hitler's coup?

BENEŠ: I could not possibly express an opinion on that as I have no facts to support such an opinion. I reproached nobody at the time when, under the German heel, the sacrifice of surrender was chosen. But Dr Hácha, our highest judge and lawyer, with the approval of his Foreign Minister, sacrificed the State internationally, and, they were never authorized to do that. If they were still alive they would be put on trial.

As for Tiso and his accomplices, they deliberately committed high treason; they shamefully stabbed in the back their own brother. There are certain rights and principles which must never under any threats or in any circumstances be sacrificed. Our unified national State has been for us a right and a principle. The hand which signed away the independence of Slovakia under the pretence of achieving its independence and thereby deprived the Czechs of their only hope of resisting

Hitler's demands can never be forgiven, nor can its action be explained or excused by anybody or anything at any time in the past or in the future.

I take an equally grave view of the attitude of some of those Czechoslovak members of the Protectorate Government and of the diplomats who, when abroad on the soil of a free country and in a position to safeguard the legal position of the Republic, professed themselves unable or unwilling to do so. The position of the Czechoslovak legations was not the same everywhere, of course. In some countries it was much simpler to find the courage to refuse from the very beginning to recognize the German occupation. There were countries, one has to admit, where it was very difficult and others where it was impossible for the legations to maintain their independence of the surrendering Government. Those who tried to save their legations and the interests of the Republic deserve our recognition. On the other hand those who were guilty of recreancy must be held responsible. Others again who, owing to special circumstances inside the respective countries, could do no more than they have done must render an account of their action to the nation, which has the right to know how her accredited representatives abroad behaved at a critical time.

MACKENZIE: And you would still prefer not to express an opinion about the behaviour of the Western Powers in failing to honour their word? It was not an encouraging example for accredited representatives.

BENEŠ: I prefer to say no more than that the guarantee given to Czechoslovakia by the Western Powers at the time of the Munich crisis after Czechoslovakia had temporarily surrendered to conditions forced upon her in the alleged interests of European peace was not honoured. The excuse given by Paris and London was that they could not honour the guarantee because of the action taken by the Czechs and the Slovaks themselves. That action was the signature wrung from Hácha and the deliberate treachery of Tiso.

MACKENZIE: Did you ever begin to fear, when things were at their worst in Czechoslovakia before the war, that the Munich Dictate would be permanently accepted as a method of securing peace in Central Europe? Did you, in fact, fear it would become a legal precedent?

BENEŠ: No, my only fear was that it would last long enough to make the task of reconstituting Czechoslovakia as a sovereign State beyond the likelihood of my seeing it accomplished in my lifetime. I sometimes doubted whether the morale of a nation could be preserved despite the activities of all the political adventurers and professionals, those so-called realists who were always subverting justice and perverting

truth. I feared the growing power of the reactionary circles that were trying to maintain their own selfish course against Masaryk's conception of political morality. I feared a gradual deterioration, political, economic, and moral, from which the nation might not recover for decades, perhaps not even for a whole century. But my great hope was—it will not happen.

However, I was sustained by my conviction that Munich was the *beginning, not the end, of a crisis*, and this conviction inspired me with the will to throw all my energy into preparing for that crisis. Munich was Hitler's first real victory because it meant his recognition in the eyes of the whole world as a responsible statesman.

MACKENZIE: Yes, that was the disaster—accepting what Winston Churchill would one day denounce as a “bloodthirsty guttersnipe” as a creature fit to sit at the same table with the Prime Ministers of Great Britain and France.

BENEŠ: Well, I can tell you that from September 30th, 1938, I never stopped thinking, day and night, how to achieve the repudiation of that despicable Munich Dictate with political and moral satisfaction to the Czechoslovaks it had seemed to destroy. I lived with one single aim in my life—the repudiation of Munich and the reconstitution of the Czechoslovak Republic.

MACKENZIE: Did not you think that the failure of Britain and France to honour their guarantee to secure the independence of what was left of Czechoslovakia after Munich automatically made the whole of the Munich agreement null and void?

BENEŠ: I agree with you, but I could not be content with what would have been a mere legal opinion. I wanted an express repudiation, and when war came, as I knew it would come, in spite of Czechoslovakia's self-sacrifice in a vain attempt to preserve the peace of Europe, I felt that an immediate repudiation of Munich was the least gesture that the Governments of the Western democracies could make. However, unfortunately the engineers of the Munich Dictate were still in power and remained in power until the cataclysm of 1940, and even when Mr Churchill, who denounced Munich at the time, became Prime Minister, many of the men who had abetted and applauded Munich remained in office. Therefore inevitably their influence was perceptible. Moreover, the fact that during the first three years the war developed unfavourably for the Allies encouraged Great Britain to maintain her traditional policy of refusing to give definite promises or undertake definite political obligations prematurely.

MACKENZIE: And this, I suppose, was always the excuse to postpone

an unequivocal repudiation of all that was signed away at Munich?

BENEŠ: Well, of course, internal politics always complicate an issue and tend to evasiveness.

MACKENZIE: Yes, over politicians the next general election looms as trial by jury over a criminal and they are always afraid that anything they may say before the trial may be used as evidence against them.

BENEŠ: Moreover, it must be remembered that for a long time the relationship between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union remained obscure and that the Soviet Union had always supposed the Munich Dictate to have been a fundamentally anti-Russian demonstration of future policy. The British statesmen, aware of this, were determined to proceed cautiously until the future relationship between Great Britain and Russia was clarified.

MACKENZIE: I suppose, when you first arrived in London in the autumn of 1938, you were not encouraged—to put it mildly?

BENEŠ: Well, of course, London was still under the spell of Munich, and even when I went over to America I had to be careful not to make myself *persona non grata* in Great Britain by indiscreet public utterances in the United States. After all, in spite of the existing mood in Great Britain, I was well aware then that the whole future of Europe depended on Great Britain's recovery from that mood of moral lethargy.

It was not until March 15th, 1939 (when the Germans occupied Prague), that I felt justified in making a public declaration of the legal continuity of the First Republic.

MACKENZIE: When you were in America?

BENEŠ: Yes. Then when the war was started by Germany's invasion of Poland, I was able to declare the legal continuity of the Republic as a basic principle of Czechoslovak policy. The second anniversary of Munich in 1940 gave me an opportunity to obtain from the British Government a public declaration which could be regarded as a first attempt to repudiate Munich. That was the moment when the Provisional Czechoslovak Government in Great Britain had been recognized and when the military units recently arrived from France were being reorganized and when Czechoslovak airmen were playing their part in the Battle of Britain.

The British Government, in recognizing the Provisional Czechoslovak Government in Great Britain, did not give any positive assurance of recognizing the original Czechoslovak frontiers, but, on the other hand, went out of the way to assert that they were bound by no previous agreement about any frontiers in Central Europe. I was not satisfied

by such a general statement, and I asked the British Government for a clearer declaration about Munich. I discussed the question with Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, who was the accredited British representative to the Provisional Czechoslovak Government. I asked Bruce Lockhart to suggest that the second anniversary of the Munich Dictate afforded a welcome opportunity for a solemn declaration addressed to the Czechoslovak people as an ally in which the Munich Dictate would be declared null and void. The Foreign Office assented in principle to the idea and discussed with me the terms of the declaration. The proposal was that the statement should be made over the wireless in the European Service of the B.B.C. either by Lord Halifax or Mr Churchill. I gave Bruce Lockhart a draft statement on Munich based on two essential facts: (a) that the agreement had been forced on the Czechoslovak Government under extreme pressure and was not in accord with the Czechoslovak constitution; (b) that it had been destroyed by the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1939.

The Foreign Office was disinclined to commit itself to so express a statement. After numerous discussions which extended over many months, first in great secrecy between myself and Bruce Lockhart, and later on with Mr Eden and Mr Nichols,¹ discussions in which, during the spring of 1942, Jan Masaryk and Dr Ripka participated, it became clear that the Foreign Office, which had to place the proposed agreement before the War Cabinet to obtain a final decision, was not prepared to go as far as we hoped and was, indeed, anxious to postpone to a much later date any attempt to solve such a delicate problem.

An indirect contribution to the final settlement of the problem between Czechoslovakia and Great Britain was made by Soviet Russia. Since the winter of 1941-42 Soviet Russia and Great Britain had been busy in negotiating a new treaty of alliance in order to remove all mutual distrust about the future conduct of the war and the peace that would succeed it. The Czechoslovak Government had been doing its best to be as helpful as possible because Czechoslovakia had a vital interest in such a treaty. It would be regarded by the Czechoslovaks as an endorsement of Czechoslovakia's own policy in the years before Munich. We Czechoslovaks knew that if then such an alliance between Russia and Great Britain had existed there would have been no Munich and no Second World War.

¹ Mr P. B. Nichols, C.M.G., was appointed Minister to the Czechoslovak Government in London in 1941 and has been Ambassador to the Czechoslovak Republic since 1942.

In May 1942 Molotov came to London to discuss the final terms of the treaty and to sign it.

MACKENZIE: I suppose you saw Molotov when he was in London

BENEŠ: Yes, I saw him on June 9th. We found ourselves in agreement upon general policy, and I was able to secure from Molotov a declaration by the Soviet Union that they would recognize the Czechoslovak Republic with its pre-Munich frontiers; that the Soviet Union had never agreed with or recognized anything that happened at Munich or after; and that it would adhere to this attitude in the future. What is more, I obtained Molotov's consent to broadcast this declaration on the Soviet Union to Czechoslovakia.

Mr Eden invited me to see him at the Foreign Office, and he told me in confidence the terms of the Anglo-Soviet talk. At the same time he expressed the thanks of the British Government for the great help given by the Czechoslovak Government and by myself personally in bringing about the successful conclusion of the treaty. We had a very long conversation, in the course of which a variety of problems were touched upon, and finally we came down to what was to me the matter of paramount importance—the unfinished, unsettled matter of the repudiation of Munich.

I told Mr Eden about my talk with Molotov, and I pointed out to him that Molotov's willingness to make a public declaration about Czechoslovakia's pre-Munich frontiers was surely an indication that it was high time for Great Britain to do the same. Mr Eden agreed with my point of view and promised to deal with the question personally and to settle the whole affair as soon as possible. I saw Mr Eden again on June 25th, when Mr Nichols and Dr Ripka were present, and once again on July 7th, when Jan Masaryk, who had just returned from the United States, was also present.

At the meeting on June 25th the British-Soviet pact with all its implications was first discussed. This topic was followed by discussion about my conversation with Molotov about the Czechoslovak-British negotiations and the Polish-Russian relationship. Mr Eden seemed particularly anxious to know if any detailed agreement between Molotov and myself existed about Czechoslovak-Soviet relations in the future.

I was able to assure Mr Eden that we desired to settle the question of the Munich repudiation directly and separately with every single country concerned in it and that nothing was involved in the Russian declaration except what was expressly stated in it. I added that as soon as the British Government had repudiated Munich I should approach the Free French for a similar repudiation.

Mr Eden then put before the Czechoslovak representatives a draft of the terms of the repudiation suggested by the British Government and suggested a compromise to settle the points still at issue. He pointed out that if the Czechoslovak Government accepted the principles embodied in this draft an agreement could quickly be reached on the basis of such a compromise:

- (i) Munich does not exist, having been abolished by Germany herself.
- (ii) The British Government does not recognize anything fixed with respect to Czechoslovakia by the Munich Agreement and in the same way does not recognize anything that happened later as a result of the Munich Agreement since 1938 in regard to the original Czechoslovak frontiers.
- (iii) The British Government undertakes that it will do nothing in the course of further international negotiations, particularly in any peace negotiations, which may have been influenced in any way by what happened in 1938.

Mr Eden explained Clause (iii) to the Czechoslovak delegates as meaning exactly the same as Dr Beneš's "integral formula," a fact which had been repeatedly, finally, and expressly confirmed by all of those who took part in the negotiations on the British side. He mentioned that Great Britain anxiously desired to see a strong Czechoslovakia with a status fully consolidated and secured. The clause should be regarded, in principle, as providing for a return to Czechoslovakia of the former natural boundaries which nevertheless would have to be formally dealt with later on in detail and in connexion with the settlement of the German and Hungarian question as soon as frontier questions became the subject of general negotiations for a final settlement.

- (iv) It is suggested to leave out the question of the legal continuity of the Czechoslovak Republic in any repudiation of Munich. The British Government fully respects the Czechoslovak point of view in this respect, but regards it only as a Czechoslovak hypothetical claim to which the British Government in principle does not object.
- (v) Besides the problem of the legal continuity of the Czechoslovak Republic a further question has been under discussion between the Czechoslovak and British Governments since 1941. This is the reservation made by the British Government when it recognized the Czechoslovak Provisional Administration in 1940

to the effect that the jurisdiction of the Czechoslovak authorities on British soil could not include certain categories of Czechoslovak citizens—*i.e.*, the Germans and Hungarians residing in districts of the Czechoslovak Republic which had been separated from the rest of the country under the Munich Agreement and the Vienna Award and incorporated therefore with Germany and Hungary. Some of these had not made common cause with the Czechoslovak authorities after their arrival in exile, and the British Government suggested in its new formula that representatives of these categories of Czechoslovak citizens should become members of the Czechoslovak State Council and that if this suggestion was accepted the British Government would withdraw the aforesaid reservation.

MACKENZIE: This draft sounds a very elaborate way of eating humble pie without getting indigestion.

BENEŠ: In justice to the Foreign Office I must point out that by now the discussion about Munich had developed into an important and far-reaching political negotiation pointing to the future.

MACKENZIE: Did not you find all these discussions wearisome?

BENEŠ: Sometimes they were tedious and sometimes I must admit they were difficult. Nevertheless, they were always carried out in friendship and in full mutual understanding; we appreciated each other's difficulties. It was necessary to be very patient and self-controlled, and also it was necessary to try to be politically wise and far-sighted. As the discussions went on the difficulties seemed to increase because problems of international implication involving British imperial policy were added to those connected with Great Britain's domestic politics. One of my difficulties from time to time was to keep down the emotion which a sudden sad memory of the Munich days would rouse in me.

MACKENZIE; I expect the British representatives at these discussions had their emotional moments when they were trying to find a way to repudiate Munich without accepting any blame for it.

BENEŠ: The trouble had been that when Mr Churchill made his declaration over the wireless on September 29th, 1940, which was based on my second point—that the Munich Agreement had been destroyed by the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939—he made no mention of the pre-Munich frontiers of Czechoslovakia, and there was a strong body of Czechoslovak opinion in London which held that Mr Churchill's statement was insufficient. However, I managed to secure from the Foreign Office an official letter signed by Bruce Lockhart in which it was explained that Mr Churchill really

had repudiated Munich and that this repudiation included any agreement signed there about the frontiers.

Nevertheless, I did not think this was enough. I saw clearly how difficult it was going to be to obtain from the Foreign Office any repudiation of Munich that would categorically cancel not only the Munich Agreement but all its later consequences and implications.

I had obtained from the British Government a declaration that the Munich Agreement did not bind it and that it regarded the frontier question of all Central European countries as an open problem. That was all very well, but this statement merely established the fact that certain things and a certain status no longer existed. What it failed to make clear was what should be regarded as the status to-day and how it envisaged the status in the future. I wanted to extract from the British Government a positive declaration that a certain status exists *now*, or at any rate that it would exist when the Germans had been defeated. I tried to secure such a declaration a year later when I was negotiating an amendment in the recognition of the Czechoslovak Government, which so far had received only the status of a Provisional Government. The Czechoslovak Government claimed, and after the negotiations acquired, a status which gave it equal standing from the point of view of international law with other Allied Governments residing for the time being in London.

Having gained this point, I went on to claim that equality with other exiled Allied Governments implied the recognition of the legal continuity of the First Republic, which would bring about implicitly the recognition of the full *status quo ante* and with that the recognition of pre-Munich frontiers.

The Foreign Office accepted the principle of the full international equality of Czechoslovakia with other States, but insisted that the question of the legal continuity and therefore of all its implications should be postponed until later because the question was too complicated and would have to be thoroughly studied in all its legal aspects and implications.

MACKENZIE (*to himself*): A procrastinational Government!

BENEŠ: We preferred to accept for the time being the view of the Foreign Office expressed in a prepared document to cover the recognition because we were anxious not to delay that recognition, with all the important political advantages such a recognition would give us. At the same time, we did not give up our efforts to secure a final and definite repudiation of the Munich decision.

I took up the subject with Bruce Lockhart shortly after Heydrich's

arrival in Prague and after the first massacres in Bohemia. My point was that the complete liquidation of Munich would have a most important influence on the morale of the Czechoslovaks at home in their struggle against Germany, and, indeed, it dealt a powerful blow against Nazi rule in Czechoslovakia.

After the first recognition there were many drawn-out exchanges of views between the two Governments, but on April 18th, 1942, I was able to send Mr Lockhart the first draft of a formula which we hoped would be adopted by the British Government for a declaration finally and for ever liquidating Munich and all its implications.

I undertook to make alterations in the draft and I had to draft several versions and every time a version went in there were objections from the Foreign Office. Every single draft, however, whatever its final alterations, always contained the following four fundamental principles:

(a) With regard to the fact that the Munich Agreement of September 9th, 1938, was arbitrarily violated and therefore destroyed by the German Government on March 15th, 1939, by the occupation of Czechoslovak territory; (b) and with regard to the fact that the Munich Agreement was imposed on the Czechoslovak Government by force and therefore cannot be regarded by the Czechoslovak Government as constitutional; (c) the British Government declares that it is not bound by this agreement nor by the implication of it; (d) and regards the legal status of Czechoslovakia at the present moment to be that which existed before Munich.

These formulæ concerning Munich which I had marked as integral met with a certain opposition from the Foreign Office, which made the following objections to such an integral repudiation of Munich:

(1) The formula as drafted by Czechoslovakia means that Great Britain would at once declare that she recognized Czechoslovak post-war frontiers, and the British Foreign Office does not think it can give such an assurance while such frontier questions are in dispute because other countries might then claim the same. Moreover, Great Britain has given the United States her word that she will not decide any question of frontiers so long as the war lasts and until such questions have been negotiated and agreed upon by common action at the Peace Conference. The war has involved the frontier question of every country more or less fundamentally, and Great Britain feels that she cannot make an exception in the case of Czechoslovakia.

(2) The declaration of the Munich Agreement to be regarded as non-existent cannot be taken as doing away with the historical and legal fact that such an Agreement was concluded. The British view is

that the Munich Agreement could not be held to cease to exist by a unilateral British declaration and could only be cancelled by a new international agreement or treaty in which the partners who originally concluded it would have a share in some form or the other. Inasmuch as such a procedure is impossible during a state of war, a less integral formula must be found to declare the Munich Agreement null and void for Great Britain and Czechoslovakia.

(3) The Czechoslovak Government continues to insist on the recognition of the legal continuity of the First Republic, and the Foreign Office is willing to make some concessions. The Foreign Office will declare that it respects the Czechoslovak point of view and does not object to it in so far as it is a Czechoslovak point of view only, but it asks the Czechoslovak Government not to insist on the international recognition of that point of view by the British Government.

The Czechoslovak objection to the British point of view can be stated as follows:

The Czechoslovak Government is ready to declare that it recognizes the fact that the Peace Conference will deal with the Czechoslovak frontier question in the same way as it will handle similar problems of other countries.

My own comment on this point was that after a victorious war the Czechoslovaks might have their own proposals and claims in the matter of frontiers and might therefore demand modification.

The second point of the British draft must be rejected by the Czechoslovak Government because it would mean accepting the fact that the Churchill Government adhered to the partial maintenance of a status created by the Chamberlain Government at Munich and that the Czechoslovaks could not accept.

However, the Foreign Office would not change its attitude, and the discussions went on. They were always lively and often difficult, as I told you just now. Nevertheless, they were carried on in complete secrecy and mutual loyalty. I always refused to make it a public matter by telling the Press. I did not want to make an international agreement a subject for political argument in Great Britain that might have affected allied unity. My impression often was that the main reason why the Foreign Office could never bring itself to accept the integral formula provided by me, and so repudiate not only Munich but the whole course of foreign policy since 1932, was that in Churchill's Cabinet many of those who had negotiated and carried out that policy which had ended in Munich were still in the Cabinet and that it was considered unwise for Mr Churchill's Government to run the slightest risk

of undermining public confidence in its democratic sincerity and thereby perhaps weaken its hold upon the people.

MACKENZIE: Your account of these strenuous efforts to obtain the repudiation of Munich reminds me of your first encounters with the Foreign Office during the First World War when you were trying to obtain British recognition for the Czech National Council. I was so much impressed by the account you gave in your memoirs of your interview at the Foreign Office with Balfour.

BENEŠ: Ah, what a charming man, and a good judge of foreign affairs. He was a little sceptical about men and things, and sometimes he was cruel in his judgment of men, in that polite and ironical manner so characteristic of him.

Personal relations between him and me were always good. He liked me, so I was told by somebody else. Unlike Lloyd George, he had a high opinion of my political judgment and of myself. For instance, he accepted purely on my recommendation the solution of the Upper Silesian question in favour of Poland. Lloyd George was always inclined to be anti-Polish, and he wanted to give Upper Silesia to Germany. In 1920 I brought three experts from Czechoslovakia, and after long discussions between Balfour and myself it was finally decided in Geneva that the Poles should keep Upper Silesia.

When I went to Scotland in 1928 I met Lord Balfour at Lord Tweeddale's, and I had what was to be my last talk with him. It was a very lovely talk. He was a really cultivated man, and his philosophical writings were on a high level. I was much influenced by his *Foundations of Belief*. Sometimes he seemed to me a little unsound in practical politics, but his judgment could be splendid even on concrete questions. For some three years after the war he was often at Geneva, where he did great work. Only once did I disagree with him, and that was over the speech against the Geneva Protocol in the spring of 1925.

MACKENZIE: But Sir Austen Chamberlain made that speech.

BENEŠ: It was written by Lord Balfour, although that was not publicly known.

MACKENZIE: What was your opinion of Sir Austen Chamberlain?

BENEŠ: A nice, honest man, but not brilliant.

MACKENZIE: I am going to ask you one or two more questions about the personalities of those years between the two wars. Did you come much into contact with Lord Curzon?

BENEŠ: Oh, yes, a good deal. When I first came to Great Britain after the last war Curzon was Foreign Secretary. He was good enough to accept me as an expert on Central European politics, but I am

bound to admit I never felt like an expert on these occasions because at the age of thirty-five I was a little awed by the grandeur of his manner. I always seemed to see him as the Viceroy of India surrounded by great ceremony. When the conversation was over and I was out of the room I always breathed a sigh of relief. However, gradually I realized that was his manner towards everybody; but I never lost the feeling that I was talking to the headmaster. Still, I must say I admired his mind.

MACKENZIE: I often wondered whether the failure to make him Prime Minister after Bonar Law was not the cause of the gradual collapse of this country's foreign policy.

BENEŠ: You may be right. I am inclined to think he might have avoided that fatal disunity between British and French foreign policy.

MACKENZIE: Barthou was a loss.

BENEŠ: A great loss. I knew him well. By 1934 he was the only man who could have saved France. When he was assassinated that was the beginning of the end.

MACKENZIE: I often wondered whether the assassination of Barthou was not just as deliberately planned as the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia, and I have always supposed that the real author of that double assassination was Mussolini.

BENEŠ: You are absolutely right. I *know* that the assassination was instrumented by Mussolini; there were definite proofs of that, and when the trial of the assassins was being prepared those proofs were to be put forward, but in view of the political situation the French authorities suppressed them.

MACKENZIE: And I have also wondered whether Hitler may not have been privy to the plot.

BENEŠ: It is not impossible. I know that at the time the associates of Pavelić were planning to assassinate Titulescu and myself at the same time. The final arrangements to assassinate King Alexander were organized in Hungary by the plotters of the Jankapuzsta, a Croatian terrorist society. Therefore Geneva was able to put the official blame of the assassination on the Government of Budapest and censure its laxity, although it was clear enough that the real blame should be borne by Mussolini. However, in 1934 neither France nor Great Britain was prepared to accuse Mussolini.

MACKENZIE: What was your opinion of King Alexander?

BENEŠ: We were on very friendly terms. I met him for the first time in 1920 when I went to Belgrade to sign the Little Entente Treaty.

We were slow in making friends; he was a suspicious and reserved man, and he lacked political experience at that date.

MACKENZIE: In the course of my work during the First World War I was entrusted by King Alexander with all the Serbian counter-espionage outside the area of operations, and believe me, Mr President, King Alexander had every reason to be both suspicious and reserved.

BENEŠ: I am sure he had, but he developed rapidly. He was an intelligent and energetic man, and he acquired a genuine knowledge of international affairs. Of course, as a monarch he belonged to the old style. He inherited the traditional conception of Serbian kingship, which was authoritative and absolutist. In all domestic Yugoslav questions he was extremely old-fashioned and believed that he must rule his people with a strong hand. Finally he completely failed to appreciate the consequences of the Russian Revolution.

I remember visiting Belgrade two weeks after the King had established his dictatorship in 1927. He explained to me in great detail why he had been compelled to set up such a regime, but although he talked for four hours I was not convinced by his arguments nor was he convinced by my arguments against it. Nevertheless, in spite of his absolutism, I admired him as a man. He worked extremely hard; he was devoted to his country; he possessed a kindly personality. I saw him two or three times under conditions when he ceased to be a king and became a man. It happened very rarely, but when it did happen I realized his loneliness, and I was always moved by the revelation of it.

MACKENZIE: And now that we are discussing some of these personalities of the past, tell me about Clemenceau.

BENEŠ: Ah, Clemenceau was the strong man. He was so clear in his conceptions about the war, so clear about the meaning of it for the future position of France. He was a little cynical, of course, but he had ideals, and he was intensely French. He was as much devoted to the future of France as to her great past. He was fundamentally French-minded and had an extensive grasp of politics. He was one of the really great men of the First World War—much greater than Poincaré or Briand.

He never in any circumstances lacked the courage of his convictions nor the courage to express them, and that in my experience is rare, very rare. He was a sharp judge of human nature. You will remember what he said of Briand and Poincaré. "Poincaré, c'est un homme qui sait tout mais ne comprend rien; Briand, c'est un homme qui ne sait rien et comprend tout." Of course, it's a little exaggerated like most epigrams, but it does characterize the two men very well.

Clemenceau had no faith in the ultimate triumph of good, but being an honest man he deceived neither himself nor other people. He was the most powerful enemy of the corrupt democrats who have brought the French Republic to disaster. He considered Briand a corrupt democrat because Briand was always carried away by the opportunity of the moment. Yes, Clemenceau was a great figure. From the very beginning he was in favour of the Czechoslovak idea. When he became Prime Minister in 1917 he knew that Austria-Hungary was finished. He administered the mortal blow to Austria when he disclosed the peace feelers made by the Emperor Charles to General Smuts and Lord Lothian (acting for Lloyd George), who believed the way to end the war was to break the Austro-German alliance. That revelation came in April 1918 after Czernin made that stupid speech in the Vienna Parliament and attacked France and Czechoslovakia, with the idea of demoralizing France. Clemenceau was so furious that he at once revealed the meeting of Lord Lothian in Zurich with the delegate of Czernin. That was the end of any chance of that separate peace for Austro-Hungary which would have destroyed all our hopes for Czechoslovakia, hopes which were high then because on February 7th, 1918, I had signed an agreement with Clemenceau in which the French Government recognized that status of the Czech Army we had built up in France. That day was a great occasion for me. I was then a young refugee of thirty-four, and it was the first time I had signed a document of importance with the Prime Minister of France. It meant that our National Council was now recognized almost as a Government. Clemenceau had the courage to do this without consultation, and it was that first public document which established our independence.

MACKENZIE: I cannot recall another example of history repeating itself so neatly as in your case, Mr President. I think, if I may say so, the work you did and the experience you gained in helping Masaryk to create the First Republic of Czechoslovakia never really revealed its importance until you were called, after Masaryk had gone, to the more tremendous task of re-creating that First Republic, which only a man of such faith as you by the grace of God have been granted would have believed was possible.

BENEŠ: You are right. I consider that my behaviour over Munich was the greatest achievement of my life. Munich was the most terrific struggle I have ever made. I can say with complete sincerity that I won a victory over my own self and was able to sacrifice that self for the sake not only of the Czechoslovak nation but also of Europe, and, indeed, of human peace.

Fortunately, at that time when I touched the lowest depths of despair I never had to reproach myself with having temporized either with Fascism or Nazism. I did not even have on my conscience, like almost all European statesmen, a single word said in favour of Mussolini. In 1923 I visited him for the first time officially in Rome and after our talk went back to the Grand Hotel. He sent his journalists round to interview me. They asked me for my impressions of Mussolini and the Fascist ideal. My reply was: "Well, gentlemen, what do you want me to say? Do you wish for compliments? It would hardly be dignified for me to pay the Duce compliments because I am his guest, and, for the same reason, I shall abstain from any criticism. Therefore, gentlemen, I shall keep silent."

I can tell you that the difficulties I had during the last war to persuade the great Powers, particularly Britain, that a Czechoslovak Republic was the solution of the problem of Central Europe were nothing like so great as the difficulty I had to persuade the Foreign Office to recognize the pre-Munich frontiers of that First Republic.

The terms of Munich were stamped on the minds of even the highest authorities at the Foreign Office. For example, I had to fight for six months for the change of the title "Czech Broadcast from London" to "Czechoslovak Broadcast from London." Even when the war had long been going on they still insisted upon excluding the word "Slovak." The Foreign Office refused to commit itself to supporting our re-establishment of the First Republic because it maintained that the British signature given at Munich would have to be respected. What has been done can never be undone; that was their view. Mr Churchill could not bring himself to disavow the past actions of his colleagues without feeling disloyal to them. I respected highly his point of view, but it indicates how difficult it is to erase the signature of a British Prime Minister. However, a week ago¹ I had luncheon with Mr Eden at which once more we definitely buried Munich and decided to revert to the pre-Munich frontiers including the territories stolen by Hungary. The administration of that pre-Munich territory is by agreement to be handed to the Czechoslovak Republic.

MACKENZIE: Let us talk of something almost as unpleasant as Munich. What was your impression of Laval?

BENEŠ: Always a very bad one, and his looks did not belie him. I met him for the first time at Geneva in 1924, when he was introduced to me on the steps of the League of Nations building. The first thing he said to me was characteristic—"A quoi sert cette boutique-là?"

¹ This was said on December 13th, 1944.

During the last war he was on the Left and became almost an anarchist at one time. In 1917 he was a Communist. He was at Zimmerwald in 1917 at the Socialist Congress when Lenin left the Internationale and established Bolshevism. After the war, in 1919, Laval was one of the first Communist candidates for the French Parliament. By 1924 he had already become a Radical candidate for the first time and was made Minister of Commerce by Poincaré. After the fall of Poincaré Laval moved still farther to the Right. In 1930 he was completely on the Right and was elected as a Senator. By that time he had become a millionaire.

As a matter of interest, it is worth recording the following conversation between Dr Beneš and myself in May 1944:

MACKENZIE: Do you think we can soon expect a Russian campaign on the grand scale?

BENEŠ: I think the Russians will begin a new drive at Vitebsk, pressing on to Riga on the line of the River Dvina, and they will certainly succeed. The Russians will be successful everywhere when they begin their attack.

MACKENZIE: Will they drive deeper into Czechoslovakia?

BENEŠ: They will go first from Luck to Lwów and then to Przemyśl. When they reach Przemyśl they will turn southward towards Czechoslovakia through Slovakia, and when they have gone through the eastern part of Czechoslovakia they will pass through the Hungarian Plain. This I think will take three months, after which they will go on to Warsaw and Eastern Prussia following the line of the Vistula.

MACKENZIE: Do you think the Germans will use gas?

BENEŠ: No, because they realize that they will receive a heavier retaliation, as they have already with the bombing.

MACKENZIE: Do you think there will be any attempt at a last tremendous air-attack on London?

BENEŠ: They can no longer do it. It would be too costly, and they need the Luftwaffe for other purposes. They have lost the submarine war, and they will soon have to admit they have lost the war in the air.

MACKENZIE: Do you think they will admit defeat?

BENEŠ: When the Allies occupy Belgium and the North of France and the Russians have advanced to the German frontier in the East I think that probably there will be a rising of the Army chiefs against Hitler because the Army knows now that the majority of the German people have turned against the Party.

MACKENZIE: Do you think the German people will try to do something for themselves?



THE LAST DAYS OF THE PROTECTORATE

German shells damage Czechoslovakia's beautiful capital during the uprising of Prague's population against the Germans.

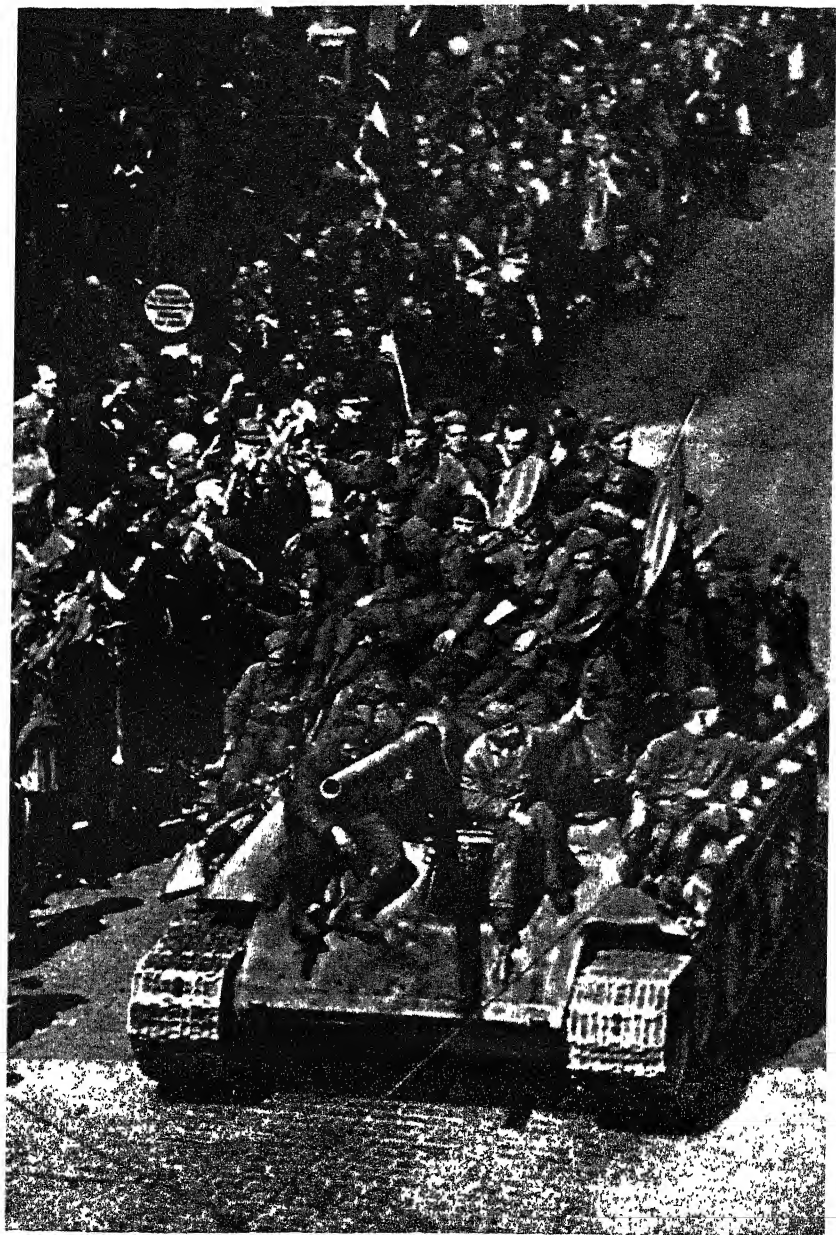


A CZECHOSLOVAK PARTISAN

On May 5, 1945, fighting breaks out in the capital.

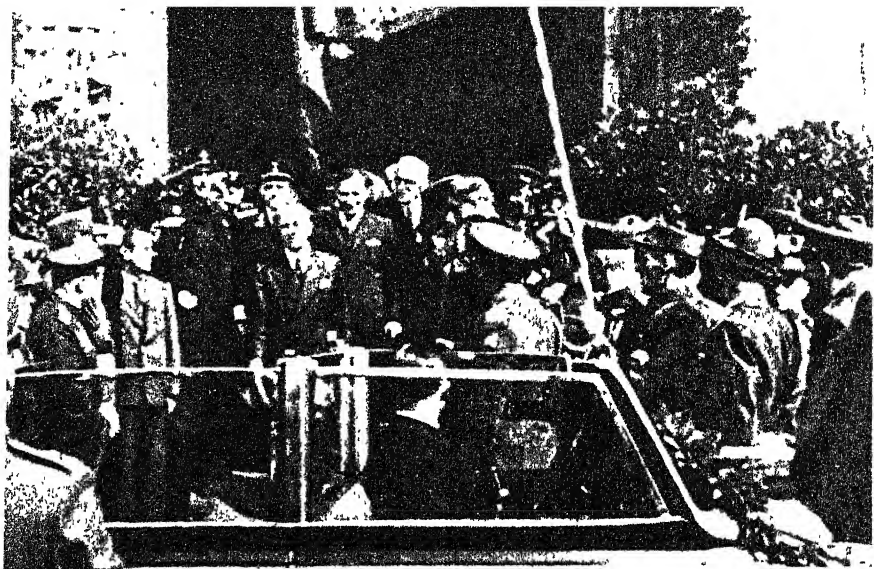


PRAGUE AT WAR
Barricades obstruct the way to important strategic points.



LIBERATION

The vanguard of the Red Army is welcomed by the cheering crowd.



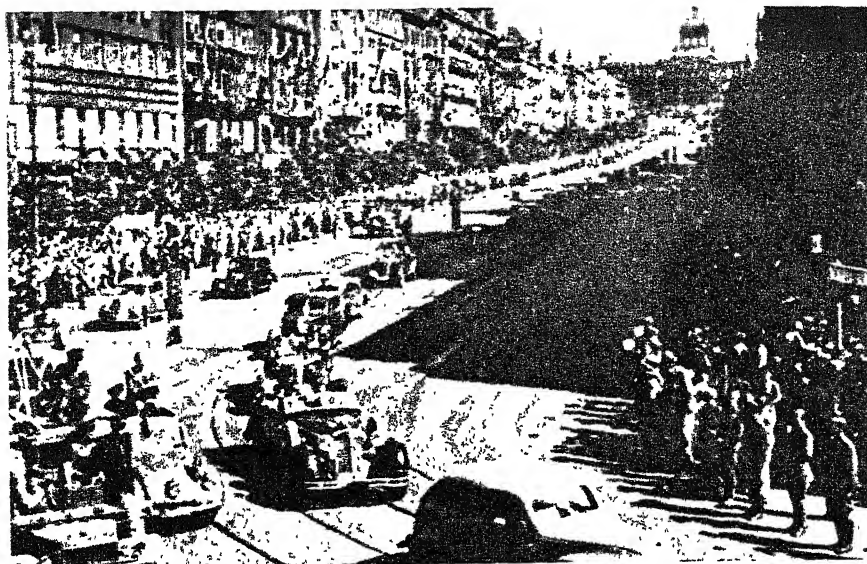
THE PRESIDENT RETURNS

On May 16, 1945, the President arrives at Wilson Station in Prague.

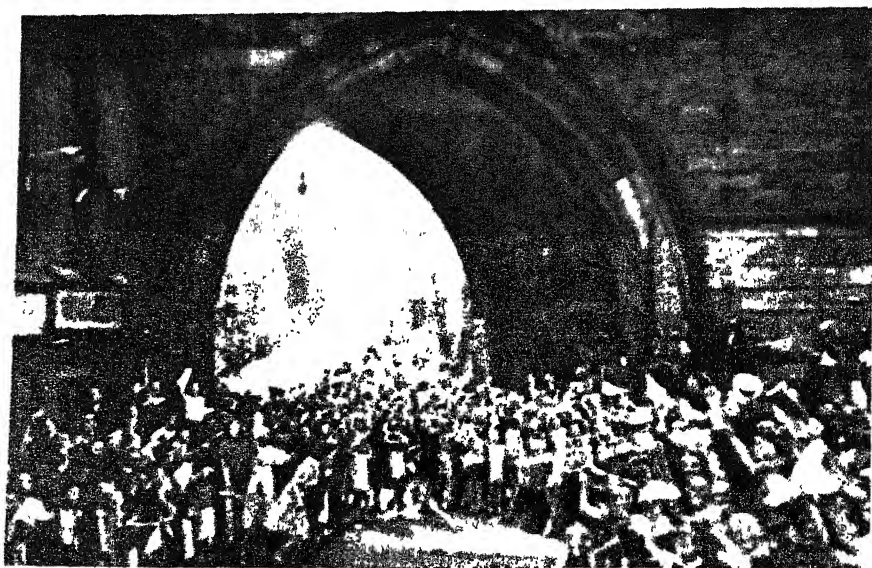


THE TRIUMPHANT JOURNEY

President and Mme Benes in their state car ride through the city of Prague.



CHEERING CROWDS LINE THE STREETS
The procession passes through Wenceslas Square—Prague's main street.



MORE CHEERS
Cheering youths wait at the bridgehead of 600-year-old Charles bridge.



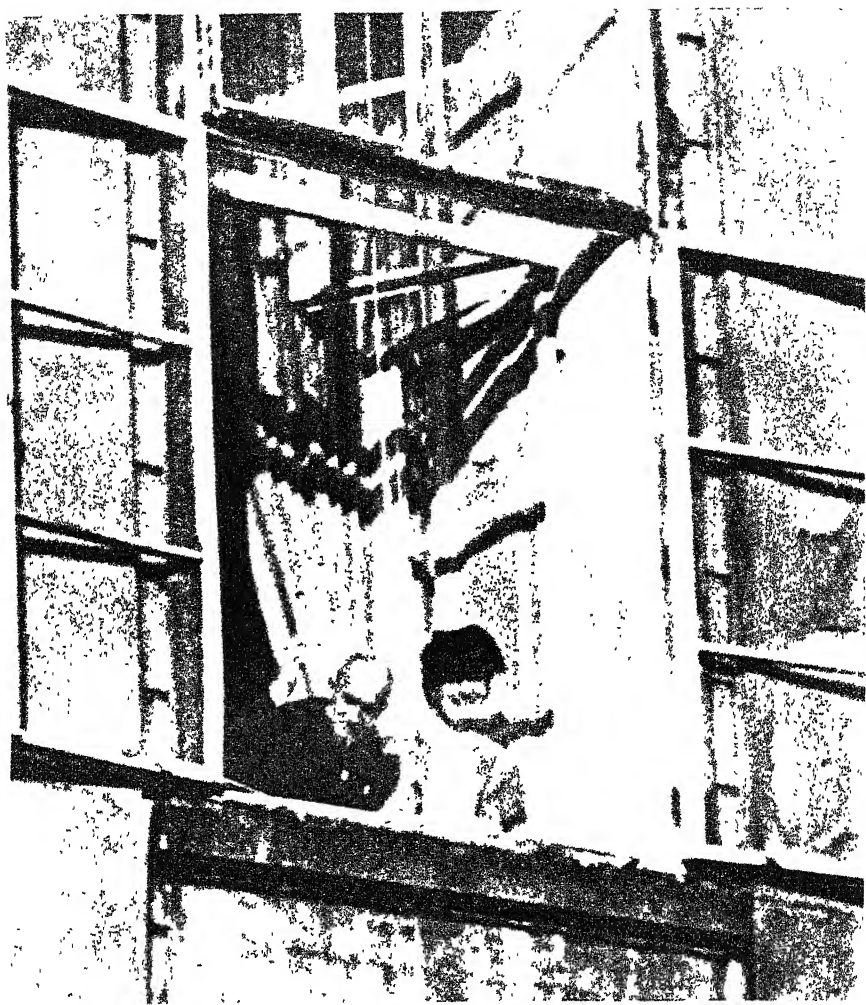
ZDENĚK FIERLINGER, PRIME MINISTER OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

He and members of his Government listen to the President's first public speech since his return.



GENERAL SVOBODA AND GENERAL BOČEK

The Czechoslovak Minister of Defence and the Chief of Staff are among the official guests.



BACK AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE
The President and Mme Beneš greet the cheering crowds.

BENEŠ: I do not think so. In the First World War the people still had some internal political life even up to the last minute. To-day this does not exist. The Nazis have admitted no political life. In Germany there are only two forces, the Army and the Party, and because the Party has had the complete responsibility of the war and its direction it can only be overthrown at the critical moment by some kind of revolt in the Army.

MACKENZIE: Do you think the war criminals will escape this time as they did last time?

BENEŠ: Not in Czechoslovakia. Without taking into consideration what kind of war trials other countries have, we shall conduct ours by military courts. For us it is war guilt, and the sentence must be passed by a kind of military court immediately. I shall try to avoid at all costs any kind of long-drawn-out political trials. Everything will be settled by court martial.

MACKENZIE: And your own position, Mr President? Do you anticipate much opposition when you return to Czechoslovakia?

BENEŠ: None, at first. For the first three to six months I shall undoubtedly have the unanimous support of the nation, and if I retired from public life then I might be considered for a certain time a kind of saint. Perhaps that would be the best thing for me to do for my personal reputation, and, having been in public life for thirty years, twenty-six of which have been spent in office, I should not find it really difficult to retire. I shall be completely sincere when I offer my resignation and tell the people that I am ready to go. In any case I shall never enter party politics again. If I do not remain as President I shall definitely retire from political life, in which case I shall return to my work as a university professor, and I shall also write my memoirs and several books I have in mind. I do not expect I shall be able to work much longer than my seventieth year, although my British doctor tells me I have an outlook for ninety years! However, I must not start talking about writing books because I have to finish another kind of work first.

I must return to my country, establish, with the help of the political parties in function, a new Government, re-establish the old Constitution, and prepare to summon a constitutional assembly to frame a new Constitution. When that has all been done they will proceed to the election of a new President because my term of office will be finished. I do not think I shall put myself forward as a candidate. If I am elected I shall accept office, but I will not make any election campaign. I shall eventually make a public declaration that I ask nothing from the people

of Czechoslovakia, and if I am not elected by a sufficiently large majority of the whole national front I shall not accept the Presidency.

The question of opposition does not really worry me, for I know perfectly well that if I am elected President I shall have an opposition perhaps six months later. All through my life I have been a fighter. I do not like gamblers in politics. I always declare openly if I am with people or against them. I also tell certain people in our country that I dislike them and that I do not wish to collaborate with them. In my opinion, strength of character is shown by having the courage to say what you are for and what you are against; whom you are for and whom you are against. That has always been my procedure. Many people think a politician cannot afford to do that, but I am convinced that people who want to stand in well with everybody either have no character and no opinions or are feeble opportunists. I do not like such a policy. I have been in responsible positions for many years, so naturally I have been obliged to rebuke many people, most of whom afterwards always fought against me. Now they are all on my side again and will remain so—for a few months at any rate. I am receiving reports from Bohemia, where my greatest enemies are now my most ardent admirers. It may be true, but I am sure that when I get back some of them will come to ask me what I intend to do for them now that they are on my side. And I shall do nothing.

EPILOGUE

A FULL narrative of the events in Czechoslovakia which preceded the return of President Beneš to Prague on May 16th, 1945, cannot be written until all the information has been collated and the historian is no longer at the mercy of the newspaper and the official *communiqué*. In the rejoicings of VE Day the significance of the fighting in Prague was hardly appreciated. The desperate need of the Germans to occupy Czechoslovakia before they plunged the world into war was matched by that last desperate effort to hold on to Prague when all was lost elsewhere.

Let President Beneš in his message to the Czechoslovak Provisional Assembly on October 28th, 1945, being the twenty-seventh anniversary of his country's liberation from three centuries of alien rule, speak for his country and himself:

"In Prague on September 26th, 1938, we listened with deep emotion to a speech made in the Berlin Sports Palace by Adolf Hitler, the German Chancellor of the Reich and Führer of the German people—a speech which was one of the most treacherous statements in his deceitful and inhuman life. Its climax was his fantastic attack on Czechoslovakia and her President, addressed to us and the rest of Europe, in these words: 'Here stand I and over there stands he. Things must be decided between us.' True, this was a struggle of two irreconcilable worlds, of democratic Czechoslovakia and the Nazi Third Reich. But politically and personally the question was put correctly by Hitler. Seven bitter years have passed. There was our Munich defeat and the frightful disappointment inflicted by the Western democracies; there was Hitler's treacherous sneaking into Prague Castle; there was Ribbentrop's historically mendacious proclamation of the legal subordination of the Czech lands to the German Reich. There were unspeakable moral sufferings, bestial German persecution and years of moral humiliation; our stubborn, systematic, gallant, and sometimes desperate resistance at home and our struggle abroad, at first extremely difficult, as well as our military and diplomatic struggle. Seven years of a frightful war, for us almost endless, of great German victories, of German inflated and uncivilized triumphs, accompanied by the most incredible German brutalities almost unequalled in history, which will remain for ever an indelible disgrace to the German nation. And in

the end the crushing and merited military defeats of the German army, and the terrible fall of the political structure called Nazism and the Third Reich, which set out to rule the world for one thousand years and condemn our State and our people to a miserable existence under the scourge of the Master Race.

"To-day we, the Czechoslovak nation, are again standing with all our moral strength in our own free Prague, hallowed by great and glorious history, and we are looking across to shattered Berlin and Munich and to the ruins of the Third Reich, our heads high, our conscience clear, in the knowledge of a great historic victory and in the knowledge that our great democratic national truth has prevailed, conscious of the unity of our national State and with great moral and political satisfaction for all that happened at Munich and afterwards.

"And Germany, with all her grandiose plans and her historical falsehoods about our lands falling legally under Germany, is lying in ruins, destroyed, shattered, in chaos, with her people crushed and morally shattered. It may take generations for her to recover. At this moment it is we who call to our nation and to the other nations: 'Yes, there stood Hitler and his Third Reich with all they stood for, and here stand we.' And things have indeed been decided between us by a life-and-death struggle, by the victory of all honest people over the most infamous evil—by the judgment of the world, of history, and of providence."

When the prologue of this book was written, such an epilogue was but a dream of poetic justice. Yet never once in the company of Dr Beneš did I doubt its fulfilment.

INDEX

NOTE—Dr. Beneš, Czechoslovakia, and President Masaryk are indicated throughout the index by their initials.

- ABYSSINIA, Mussolini's threat to, 168; appeal of, to the League for protection, 172; Italian troops in, 173; attitude of the Foreign Office, 175, 191; British people and its surrender to Mussolini, 204
- Albania, Mussolini's taking of, 188
- Alexander, King of Yugoslavia, assassination of, 167; Mussolini's responsibility for, 332; B. on his character and personality, 332-333
- Aloisi, Baron, 173
- Alsace-Lorraine, France's claim to, 95
- Ambassadors, conference of, and Greece, 148
- Amerling, Dr, 63
- Andrassy, Count, detention of, 142
- Annual Register*, quoted, 151, *n.*, *et seq. passim*
- Antonescu, Marshal Ion, 179
- Asch, B.'s escape from, 63
- Ashton-Gwatkin, F. T. A., 128; and Cantonal self-government for C., 200, 201; at Munich conference, 232-233
- Asinra island, condition of Czech prisoners of war at, 75
- Aston Abbots, B.'s home at, 262
- Attlee, Clement, and the dismemberment of C., 210, 228
- Austria, C. loan to, 147; agitation for the Anschluss, 147, 186, 187; B.'s warning against to Dr Stresemann, 160; and the Berlin-Rome axis, 183; Hess's conspiracy to destroy, 186
- Austria-Hungary, universal suffrage won for, 44; B.'s attitude towards, 48; formation of a secret committee for political workers against "Maffia", 57; Czech declaration of war on, 66; Allied intentions, declarations of, 78, *et seq.*; M. and B.'s determination to destroy, 85, 95, 101; feared revival of, 106; and a separate peace, 334
- Austrian Ministry of the Interior, B.'s tapping of through Kovanda, 55, 60
- Azerbaijan Republic, B.'s visit to, and account of, 312-313
- BAKU, the oil wells of, 312
- Balbín, Bohuslav, on the Habsburgs, 26
- Baldwin of Bewdley, Earl, and the Protocol, 156; on the situation in 1927, 157-158; on C., 158; and his fear of losing a general election, 164; as Prime Minister, 1935, 171; and Hitler, 171, 172; on the League of Nations, 174; and the Royal marriage, 204; and rearmament, 210; and "discussions with a dictator", 257
- Balfour, Arthur, first Earl of, and his promise to King Constantine, 81; B.'s interview with, 97; on recognition of Czechoslovak movement and army, 98, 252; B.'s admiration for, 99, 100, 331; and the declaration of the British Government on C., 101
- Banát, the, 141
- Bartha, Dr W., Minister of War, 117
- Barthou, Louis, 145, 166; assassination of, 167; Mussolini's responsibility for, 332
- Bata system of production, the, 282
- Battle of Britain, Czech pilots in, 257
- Bauer, Otto, 117
- Beck, Colonel Josef, and the Non-Aggression Pact, 163; his approach to France, 164; his intrigues with the enemy, 164, 179; and Těšín, 291
- Bela, Vice-President of first National Assembly, 114
- Beneš, The Man and the Statesman* (Hitchcock), on B.'s voluntary exile, 238 & *n.*, 239-240
- Beneš, Anna, mother of B., 30
- Beneš, Bedřich, taking over by, of his father's farm, 34
- Beneš, Bohuš, 252; journey of, to Tábor to urge B.'s speedy departure, 238
- Beneš, Edvard, appearance, his beard, 107 & *n.*, 122, 262; and dress, 262
- Biographical references:*
- Ancestry and birth, 30, 31, 32; his name, 32; inclination towards the Church, 33; childhood, 34, 36; defiance of German boys, 34; his studies, coaching of other boys and Gymnasium Report, 1904, 34-35; his father's retirement and division of his money, 34; his religious views, 36; as journalist, 37; M.'s interest in, and B.'s view of, 37, 46; at the Sorbonne, 38, 39; his preparation for his political career, 39; life and studies in Paris, 39; his meeting with his future wife, 40-41; first visit to London and his impressions, 42-43, 257;

seizure of his books and papers at Berlin, 1907, 44; Doctor of Laws of Dijon University, 45; recognition of, refused by Charles University, 45; Doctor of Philosophy of Prague University, 46; teacher at Prague Commercial Academy, 46, 49; his marriage, 46; as linguist, 46; his years of political preparation, and refusal of patrons, 49; increasing rejection of Marxian views, 49, 51; his History of Socialism and other literary work, 49; and the social problem of alcoholism, 50; a *docent* of Prague University, 50; his philosophical and religious development, 50-51; his home, 51; and the outbreak of war, 51; conspiratorial activities, 64; Hitler's opinion of, 64; his return to Paris as M.'s representative, 65; his lodgings, life and activities, 65; visits to London and Oxford, 74; first visit to Rome, 83; his steady social rise, 88; a threat to his life, 92; the declaration of the British Government as his outstanding achievement, 101; and the month of September, 102; his position strengthened, 114; his attendances at a private Court of Honour, 133-134, 160; his duties at Geneva, 134; holiday at Port Cros, 135; Press attacks on, 135; and democracy, 135; charge of corruption over Agrarian Reforms, 135, 160; a Member of the French Academy of Moral and Political Science, 160; D.C.L., Oxford, 162; President of Council of the League, 165; physical condition of, after the Franco-British ultimatum, 214-215; his residence at Putney, 239-240, 252; lecturer at Chicago University, 241, 242; honorary degree of Columbia University, 251; his seven years in England, 257; Mackenzie's first meeting with, 261; and later conversations with, 262 *et seq.*; his home at Aston Abbots, 262; and religion, 265-266, 271-272, 278-279; early literary influences, 266; his decision to be a professor of sociology and philosophy, 267-268; on the course of European depression, 269; on education as corner-stone of democracy, and the Education Bill, etc., 274 *et seq.*; and propaganda, 278; and Communism, 279, 281; a return to the Humanities, 280; on the effect of excessive industrialism on the individual, 282; his three categories of property, 282; on mechanization, 284; establishment of friendly relations with the Vatican, 287-289; return to London, 315

Character and Characteristics:

his love of books and early reading, 32, 35; astuteness, 33; rejection of smoking and drinking, 34, 47; love of argument, 34; his nationalism, 34; love of football, 35, 55; his industry, 36; emotionalism, 37; innate puritanism, 43; M. on, 52; Paris the perfect milieu for his special qualities, 66; his impatience of self-indulgence, 69; tactful constructiveness, 73; sense of the right moment, 96; lack of personal ambition, 118; parity with Venizelos, 119; his "longueur" and volubility, 123, 129; the accusations of "plausibility" and "insincerity", 129; his frankness, 129; cleverness and honesty, 130; his inhuman efficiency, 135; steadiness and endurance, 200; rapidly working mind, 216; personality, 262; his self-denial and charity, 262, 263; as an opportunist, 263; his optimism, 51, 263, 273; as the symbol of democracy, 265; his logic, 273; a fighter, 338

Political activities:

his political outlook, 36, 37, 49, 132; realization of Germany as world peace danger, 44-45; a major problem, 46; attitude to Austria-Hungary, 48 & *n.*; member of Progressive Realist Party, 49, 132; on class hatred, 50; attitude to First World War, 51; his work with M., 52; and the Social Democrat Party, 54; M.'s appreciation of, 54, 55; his secret activities, 55, 60; journey to Switzerland to warn M., 56; his passports, 57, 59; his aliases, 57, 68; financial support, 58 & *n.*, 59; his lectures, 59; under police supervision and escape to Geneva, 62-63; the first decisive measure towards revolution, 67; imprisonment of, 68; Secretary-General of the Conseil National, 69 *et seq.*; Foreign Minister of C., 72, 104, 148; connection of, with Chantilly G.Q.G., 75, 76; detention of at Southampton, 76 & *n.*, 97-98; and the German Peace proposals, 1916, 78 *et seq.*; and the decision to acknowledge the Czech movement, 80-81; as President, his initial shortcomings, 82; visits to Rome, 83; and the organization of the C. army, 86 *et seq.*, 91, 94; and Balfour, 97; his great aim, 98; and the significance of the word "trustee", 100; declaration of the British Government handed to, 101; instructions to Prague, 104-105; proclamation of State independence, 105, 112-113; reception of, by the

Czech army, 105-106; at the Geneva Conference, 1918, 108; his insistence on representation at Allied Conferences, 109; at the Supreme War Council, 110; Lloyd George on, 110; and withdrawal of Magyar troops from C., 116-117; M.'s advice to, on preparing for his return home, 118; his forecast of his reception by his people, 1944, 119; his summons to Prague, 121; at the Quai d'Orsay, 122; and Bohemia's ultimate aims, 124; Nicolson on, 124-125; and the balance of power, 124; the Nine Point Note, to Berthelot, 126 *et seq.*; and the Swiss Republic as a prototype of C., 128; Foreign Minister of C., 131, 132, 133; and the Peace Conference, 131; M.'s determination to make him his successor, 133; as Prime Minister, 133; a National Socialist, 134; Chairman of the League Council, 134; President of the Assembly, 134; duties at Geneva, 134-135; refusals to visit Hitler, 135, 191; elected President, 136, 177; and the Tripartite Agreement against Hungary, 140-141; opposition of, to the Habsburgs, 142-143; and Russia, 144; and a Franco-British Pact, 145; the Genoa Conference, 144 *et seq.*; signing of a political treaty with France, 149; and with Italy, 149; and the Geneva Protocol, 149, 152, 153; the League of Nations, 155; attacks on, 156, 160, 161; and the forged banknotes, 156; and Austen Chamberlain, 157; the charge of intolerance towards Hungary, 159; and the Briand-Kellogg Pact, 159; his first official visit to Berlin, 159; rejection of Dr Schacht's proposed Central-European Union, 160; and the Disarmament Conference, 161; Statute of the Little Entente signed by, 162; and the Four-Power Pact, 163; and revision, 167; President of League of Nations Assembly, 172, 173; Conference with King Carol, 179; his speech at Reichenberg, 179; his compromise abroad a cause of unpopularity, 181; as C.-in-C. of Armed Forces, 182; Catholic support of, 182, 289; and a proposed Non-Aggression Pact, 183; his belief in possibility of an understanding with Germany, 188-189; belief in the power of reason, 189; his May Day telegram to Hitler, 191; and Sudeten Germans, 188-192; his speech at Tábor, 194-195; Hitler's hatred of, 195-196; and the Henleinists, 196; his sacrifices for peace, 197; and Rumania, 198; a Fourth Plan

for C. desired by, 201; and its dismemberment, 207 *et seq.*; and the attitude of France, 213, 214; his broadcast to the nation, Sept. 22nd, 215-216; his plans, 216; Chamberlain's telegram to, on Hitler's determination on war, and his refusal to give advice, 225; Mussolini on, 226; resignation and farewell broadcast, 236-237; retirement to his country house, 238; voluntary exile from C. and residence at Putney, 239-240; reaction against in C., 241; later action of, 248-249; first speech to the Americans, 251; his relations with the Soviet Union, 254; official visit to U.S.A. and Canada, 255; punishment of war criminals, 255-257; and the turning of Hitler on Stalin, 258; and the League of Nations, 259; threat of war never preached by, 260; Hitler's recognition of, as his worst enemy, 260; Poles and Russians, transference of population as a final settlement, 291; value of a federal union between Poland and C., 294; significance of Greek resistance at Thessaly, 299-300; his aim a full understanding with the Soviet, 302-303; his journey to Russia and report for M., 307 *et seq.*; resignation as President, 315; accusations against, 316; and Dr Lisicky, 316 *et seq.*; failure to anticipate Hitler's coup, March 14th, 1939, 320; his conduct over Munich the greatest achievement of his life, 334-335

Beneš, Madame Hanna, her farewell to B. at Prague, 63; arrest and imprisonment of, 63; later meeting with B., 63, 74; and B.'s beard, 107; her stay at Port Cros, 135; at Putney, 252

Beneš, Matěj, B.'s father, 30; his desire to educate his sons, 32; retirement from active work and division of his money, 34

Beneš, Václav, brother, B.'s payment for his board and lodging, 35, 238

Beneš, Vojta, and the collection of funds in the U.S.A., 58-59; his activities known in Vienna, 62

Beran, Rudolf, Prime Minister of C., and Tiso, 243

Berchtesgaden, 15; Chamberlain's flight to, 203

Berlin, B.'s visit to and the seizure of his books and papers, 44; military atmosphere of, 44-45

Berthelot, Philippe, and the German peace feelers, 78; B. received by, 79; and the British Declaration on C., 101; on sus-

- pected negotiations with Austria, 106; and Czechoslovak representation at Allied Conferences, 109; the private Note from B. on minority rights, 126 *et seq.*
- Bílá Hora, White Mountain Battle, *see that head*
- Billote, Colonel, B.'s visits to, 75-76
- Bismarck, Prince, and Austria, 18, 181
- Blum, Léon, 186
- Blum-Boncour Government, and the Czech alliance, 214
- Bogomolov, Soviet ambassador to C. in London; B.'s questions and Moscow's replies, 303
- Bohemia, raising to a Kingdom, 21; Pastor on the revolution, 24; German influx into, 24-25; situation in 1615 compared with that of 1938, 25; re-Catholicization of, 26; her ultimate aim, 124; the holder of, as strategic master of Europe, 181; German propaganda in, 243; early history of, 258-259
- Bonnet, Georges, 191, 197, 202, 206; and the dismemberment of C., 214; and the British declaration, 221; and an appeal to Mussolini, 226
- Borsky, Dr, his refusal of a passport made out for Miroslav Sícha, 61
- Bourne, Cardinal, and B., 287
- Bratianu, Ion, 122
- Bratislava (Pressburg), battle at, 20
- Briand, Aristide, 158; and official French support for the Czech movement, 68, 81-82; and Lloyd George at Cannes, 144; and the Protocol, 153; Briand-Kellogg Pact, 1918, 159; his proposal for United States of Europe, 160
- Brno, 39
- Burgenland dispute, the, B.'s action and the settlement of, 141-142
- Burian, Count Stephen, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the British Declaration on C., 102, 103; and proposed exchange of views on basic principles of peace, 103; results of, 103-104
- Burrows, Ronald, 67
- Butler, Dr Nicolas Murray, and B.'s visit to New York, 242; his speech at Columbia University on the capping of B., 251
- CADORNA, General, and Štefánik's information, 120-121
- Cairo, British-American-Chinese Conference at, 1943, 307
- Cambridge Mediaeval History*, Bohemia in the fifteenth century (Krofta), quoted, 24
- Čapek, Karel, 55 & n.
- Caporetto, Italian defeat at, 93
- Cás (The Time), 61; B. a member of the staff, 51, 52
- Cecil, Lord Robert, on the Czechoslovak Delegation at the Peace Conference, 19; B.'s meeting with, 89, 97; report on Czechoslovak army in Siberia, 97; B.'s admiration for, 99, 100; his resignation, 157
- Chamberlain, Sir Austen, K.G., Foreign Secretary, and the torpedoing of the Protocol, 151-152; the signing of the Locarno Treaties, 153; and the Briand-Kellogg Pact, 159; and Italy's rights in Abyssinia, 172; a speech written for, by Balfour, 331; B.'s opinion of, 331
- Chamberlain, Neville, and C., 32, 128; and Austria, 186; and the League of Nations and Hitler, 187-188; on the C. Republic, 193, 197; and the sending of an Adviser to Prague, 197-198; flying of, to Berchtesgaden, 203; opinion of in U.S. and France, 204; matters discussed there, 205; the position of C. 206; meeting with Hitler at Godesberg, 217-218; his belief in obtainable peace, 220; his proposal of further appeal to Hitler, 223; his conviction he was the voice of the British people, 224; on Hitler's speech, 224; refusal of responsibility of advising B., 225; further letter to Hitler, 226; his appeal to Mussolini, 226; his defeatist broadcast, 226-227; and Hitler's invitation to Munich, 228; account of, 230; and the Munich Conference, 1938, 230; his answer to B.'s appeal, 231; acceptance of the Godesberg Memorandum, 232; his undisguised fatigue, 234; and his attitude to taking over of C., 246; his report to Parliament, 247; his Birmingham speech, 247; his contribution to peace, 258; the British Government and Hitler's coup, 1939, 320
- Chantilly G.Q.G., B. and Czech prisoners of war, 75, 76
- Charles I, Emperor of Austria, and the possibility of a separate peace, 84; his letter on France's claim to Alsace-Lorraine, 95; his offer of federal autonomy to nations of the Empire, 106; as a threat to the present, 125; entry of into Hungary, and the result, 140-141, 142; and Smuts, 334
- Chautemps Cabinet, resignation of, 186
- Cheb, B.'s journey to, 63

- Chicago University, B.'s lectures at, 242; voted by the students the most outstanding man of the year, 242
- Chicherin, G. V., agreement signed with Rathenau, effect of, 147
- Churchill, Rt. Hon. Winston, 171; and the destruction of the Liberal Party, 150-151; attack on MacDonald, 163; on Baldwin, 176; anti-German attitude, 178; and the independence of C., 186; his declaration on, 220; speech on the disintegration of C., 242; on boundaries fixed by Hitler, 255, 327-330; Hitler's estimate of, 260; and Russia, 263, 300; his denunciation of Hitler, 322; his loyalty to his colleagues, 335
- Chvalkovský, Dr. and Hácha, 244; and Ribbentrop, 244, 245; and B.'s future plans, 316-317
- Civilization: Its Cause and Cure* (Carpenter, trs. Beneš), 49
- Clemenceau, Georges E., on the Czechoslovak Delegation at the Peace Conference, 19; and a separate peace with Austria, 87; signing of decree for Czechoslovak Army, 89, 97; and Czernin, 95; assurances of support to B., 96; his wish to have the Czechoslovak troops in France, 98; and the British Declaration on C., 101; his reply to Burian's peace proposals, 104; his rudeness, 122; on B.'s "longueur", 123; on Briand and Poincaré, 333; B. on his character and activities, 333-334
- Columbia University, B. offered an honorary degree, 251
- Communist Party in Great Britain, attitude of at start of Second World War, 54
- Condouriotis, Paul, and the provisional Government at Salonica, 81
- Connaught, Duke of, and the possibility of his acceptance of the Kingdom of Bohemia, 54; and of Greece, 54
- Conseil National des Pays Tchèques, replacement by, of the Foreign Committee, 69; in Paris, 69. *See* Czechoslovak National Council.
- Constantine, King of Greece, and the Rome Conference, 1917, 81
- Consulta, the, B.'s interview with Demartino, 83; and the Czechoslovak Army in Italy, 93
- Cooper, A. Duff, his resignation after the Munich Conference and his address to the House, 235
- Corfu, bombardment of, 148
- Coulondre, French Ambassador in Berlin, and the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, 244
- Council of Ten, Czech case stated to, 122
- Cracow, Russian forces near, 57
- Curzon of Kedleston, Marquess, and Poincaré, 149; and the Protocol, 151; B. on his personality, 332
- Cushendun, Lord, and the Briand-Kellogg Pact, 159
- Czarnomski, F. B., London correspondent of the *Kurier Warszawski*, and a union between Poland and C., 293
- Czech Association of Petrograd, and the Kiev Association, 72
- Czech Brigade, formation of, 62
- Czech Catholics' Alliance, 251
- Czech Deputies in the Reichsrat, 84
- Czech National Alliance meeting in Chicago, 251
- Czech Social Democratic Party, 49; B. on its policy, 54, 55
- Czechoslovak Army, the, prisoners of war as the nucleus of, 71 *et seq.*; as the only really effective argument, 85; B.'s organization of, 86 *et seq.*; Stalin's support of, 90; its difficulties in France, 90 *et seq.*; Janin, and its transfer to Western front, 93-94; presentation of colours to the 21st Regiment of Infantry at Darnay, 94, 96, 112; British idea for utilization of, 97; Clemenceau's wish to have in France, 98; British recognition of, 98; B.'s visit to, in the Alps, 105-106; cited in an Order of the Day, 112; organization of, 113; B.'s new military agreement with Foch, 113; B. as Commander-in-Chief, 182; the best equipped of its size, 182
- Czechoslovak Associations League, 70
- Czechoslovak Convention between the Slovaks and Czechs of America signed by M. at Pittsburg, 96-97
- Czechoslovak Fascist Party, 134, 136
- Czechoslovak Foreign Committee, establishment of, and declaration by, of war on Austria-Hungary, 66; replaced by the "Conseil National des Pays Tchèques", 68-69. *See that head*
- Czechoslovak Legation, London, raised to Embassy status, 255
- Czechoslovak Legion, in Siberia, 132
- Czechoslovak National Council, the, establishment in Paris of the Secretariat-General, 69; B. as Secretary-General, 69; its activities, 69-70; official recognition by

the Quai d'Orsay, 72; dissension in, 72-73; resolution passed at Kiev defining its position, 73; Allied opinion on, 73; and the war prisoners, 75; discussion of its demands, and plans evolved, 79-80, 84; B.'s work on, 86; Declaration of the British Government as the most important political achievement during the war, 101; first noticed by the Government in Vienna, 102; recognition of, by U.S.A., 102; B.'s efforts to get transformed into an effective interim Government, 102-103, 104; and the Geneva Conference, 1918, 109; B. as Leader, 251; recognition of, by Daladier, 252; and by Halifax, 252

Czechoslovak-Polish Committee, purpose of, 252-253

Czechoslovak Provisional Government, recognized by H.M. Government, 252

Czechoslovak-Soviet Pact, and France, 169

Czechoslovakia, Hitler's demand for surrender of, 13; threats to, 15; as a Versailles blunder, 18; early history, 19 *et seq.*; Hitler's claim it had been a German principality, 21; suggested as main conduit for Bolshevik poison, 24; collapse of, 49; and the creation of a Czechoslovak Army, *see that head*; demonstration of St Martin, 96; aims of the National Council, Balfour's attitude to, 100; situation saved by use of the word "Trustee", 100; Declaration of the British Government handed to B., 101; Declaration by Washington, 102; effect of on Burian, 103-104; proclamation of State independence, 105; negotiations for an Italian agreement, 106; proclaimed an independent State, 108-109; representation of, at Allied discussions, 109; recognition of, by the Allies, 111; feeding of the people, 113; the National Assembly, 114; American demand as to negotiations, 117; the frontiers of, 117-118, 125; B.'s international justification for the succession State of C., 124-125, 129; B.'s personal nine point note to Berthelot, 126 *et seq.*; Minority Treaty with the Allies, 128; German co-operation with the Government, 128; B.'s methods to secure recognition of the Czechoslovak State and Army, 129; B. as Foreign Minister, 131, 140; protection of irredentism, 140; formal defensive alliance with Yugoslavia, 140; obstacle to good relations with Poland, 144; boundary disputes with Poland, 147; forgeries of bank-notes,

157; the link between West and East, 166; Treaty of Commerce and Navigation with Russia, 169; B. elected President, 1935, 177; events in since 1920, 177; centre of Goebbels's propaganda, 179; the democracy of, 180; the German minority in, 181; erroneously regarded as a Communist salient, 182; British support for the French, 191; manning of fortifications of the "Little Maginot Line", 195; Ribbentrop's denial of intention to invade, 195; and the Nationalities Statute, 193, 194, 197; suggested division of into Cantons, 200; and the "Hussite terror" and German reprisals taken for, 203; proclamation of martial law, 203; Chamberlain's arrangement with Hitler, 206; return to Germany of States with over fifty per cent German inhabitants, 206; the Government's reply to, 207-209; and later developments, 210 *et seq.*; demand for a military dictatorship, 215; the Godesberg memorandum and the reply to, 217, 222-223; Nazi terrorism in, 218; B.'s order for mobilization, 218-219; Foreign Office declaration on the position, 221; proposed further appeal to Hitler, 223; informed of Hitler's decision on entry into, 225; warned that her frontiers would never be restored, 226; request for extension of time of final evacuation, 226; the Munich Conference and its result, 230 *et seq.*; the frontiers of 1918 wiped out, 234; Munich Agreement accepted by the leaders of, 234; conditions in after B.'s resignation, 237; a taxi driver's view of the position, 238-239; the disintegration of, Churchill on, 242-243; Hitler's method, 243 *et seq.*; Slovak Diet and adoption of a Declaration of Independence, 243; handing over of C. to Hitler, 245; entry into of German tanks and Hitler's brief visit, 245-246; B.'s broadcast to the American people, 248-250; alliance with Russia and formation of a Czechoslovak army, 252; declaration by the Government of a state of war, 252; repudiation of boundaries fixed by Munich, 255; pilots of, in the Battle of Britain, 258; occupation by, of a key position, 276; return to Germany of the German population, 293; suggested federal union with Poland, 294; fear of the Sovietizing of, 296; treaty with Russia, 1941, B. on, 301 *et seq.*; and Poland, B.'s hope for an understanding, 303, 304;

- signing of the 1943 Treaty, 308; Russia's sense of co-operation with, 308; the crushing sense of isolation, 1939, 319; Hitler's coup and the separation of Slovak territory from the Republic, 320; the efforts to save the legations, 321; guarantee by the Western Powers, failure of to honour, 321; the legal continuity of the Republic, 323; the struggle for the pre-Munich frontiers, 325 *et seq.*; status of the Government while in London, 328
- Czechoslovakia in European History* (S. Harrison Thomson), quoted, 27 & *n.* 1
- Czechs, the, of Bohemia, a race of peasants, 33; necessity for corporate action, 66; French support for the Movement, 68; independence, the larger idea at the back of, 68; Quai d'Orsay and support of the Movement, 80-81; their fundamental commonsense, 136; preoccupation of, with religion in relation to the State, 271; relations with Slovaks, 285
- Czernin, Count Ottokar, Austrian Foreign Minister, and a separate peace, 83-84, 334; his speech on the Czechoslovak movement and French claims to Alsace-Lorraine, 95; resignation, 95; attack on Czech treachery, 96
- Daily Mail*, Hitler's interview with Ward Price, 16
- Daladier, Edouard, Prime Minister, 197, 202; visit to Chamberlain, and the result, 191; and the Berchtesgaden visit, 204, 206; and the dismemberment of C., 214, 223; and an appeal to Mussolini, 226; and Hitler's invitation to Munich, 228; account of, 230-231; and the Munich Conference, 1938, 233, 236; and the Finnish war, 300
- Danglis, and the provisional Government set up at Salonica, 81
- Darnay, presentation of colours at, to 21st Regiment of Czechoslovak Infantry, 94
- Della Torretta, Italian Foreign Minister, and the Burgenland, 142
- Delmé-Radcliffe, Brigadier-General, 97
- Demartino, Secretary-General of the Consulta, B.'s interview with, 83
- Denis, Professor, editor, 59
- Dickinson, Lord, attitude of, to Germany, 168
- Dijon University, B.'s studies at for his Doctorate, 39; his thesis, 45
- Disarmament Conference, B. as *rapporteur*, 161; Russian appeal at, 165
- Disarmament Conference Preparatory Commission, B. a member of, 158
- Dmowski, Roman, at Oxford, 74
- Dobrovský, Josef, and the rescue of the Czech language, 27
- Dollfuss, Engelbert, and Mussolini, 166; assassination of, 166; B.'s proposed Treaty of Friendship against any aggression, 182
- Drang nach Osten*, 18, 253, 294, 302
- Dürich, Josef, 67, 71 *et seq.*
- EASTERN LOCARNO PACT, 164-165
- Eden, Anthony, on Churchill's attack on MacDonald, 163; and the year 1935, 167; meeting with Stalin and B., 168; and Abyssinia, 174, 175; his resignation from the Government, 235, 236; B.'s meetings with, 304, 325, 335
- Eisenlohr, von, German Minister, 203
- Eisenmann, Professor L., account of, 65
- England, characteristics of the people, 126
- Époque*, quoted, 187-188
- Espionage, the nervous strain of, 56 *n.* 1
- Europe, position in 1384, 22; economic depression in 1930, 160, 161; rapid crumbling of, 161
- Fallen Bastions* (Gedye), quoted, 196, 200, 238
- Fierlinger, Zdeněk, a signatory to the 1943 Treaty, 308
- Finnish War, the, 300
- Flandin, P. E., 173
- Foch, Marshal Ferdinand, 86, 107, 111; to remain C.-in-C. of the Czechoslovak Army, 113
- Fořt, Dr Joseph, and an invitation to B. to join the Young Czech Party, 49
- Four-Power Pact, and Ramsay MacDonald, 163
- Foundations of Belief* (Balfour), B. on, 331
- France, support of, for the Czech movement, 68; political treaty with, signed by B., 149; her demand for security, 161; and German conscription, 168; Pact of Mutual Assistance with Russia, 168; calling up of naval reservists, 202; moral collapse, 1938, cause of, 204; and the partition of C., 214, 221; attitude to, of politicians of the Right, 221; B.'s love for, 240; refusal of the Government to recognize the new position of C., 250
- France and Munich* (Werth), quoted, 187-188 & *n.*
- Franchet d'Espérey, General, and Karolyi, 115

Francis Ferdinand, Archduke, murder of at Sarajevo, 51
 Francis Joseph, Emperor, 29; and the Hungarian revolt, 30; death, 84
 Franco, General Francisco, 182
 Franco-Czechoslovak Treaty, 153-156
 Franco-Russian Pact, 169
 François-Poncet, French Ambassador, and the acceptance of the Godesberg demands, 227
 Frank, Karl Hermann, on B., 185-186; and Henlein, 201; their flight to Germany, 203
 Fransoni, Italian Minister, and the Munich Conference, 235
 Frederick V, King of Bohemia, 25
 French Academy of Moral and Political Science, B. a member of, 160
 French Committee of National Liberation, 255
 Frič, a secret agent, 57-58

GALLACHER, W., on the postponement of war with Germany, 228-229
 Gamelin, General, and the partition of C., 221
 Garrigue, Charlotte, *see* Masaryk, Madame Thomas
 Gaspari, Cardinal, and the Hus celebration, 288
 Gaulle, General Charles de, and C.'s frontiers, 255
 Gauvain, Auguste, foreign editor of *Journal des Débats*, account of, 65-66; articles by, 66-67, 80
 Gedye, G. E. R., book by, 196, 200 & n., 238
 Geneva, B.'s escape to, and meeting with M., 63; the Conference, 1918, 107, 108, 113
 Geneva Protocol, the, 149 *et seq.*
 Genoa Conference, B. and Lloyd George at, 144 *et seq.*
 German and Polish Pact of Non-Aggression, effect of, 164
 Germany, and the cause of the Second World War, 19, 126; Czech radicalism in, 24; B. and the menace to world peace, 45; B. repelled by, 48; and the First World War, peace overtures, 1915, 77; and Pan-Germanism, 85; early collapse of, not anticipated, 107; mistake of the Armistice, 111; barrier to expansion eastwards, 125; Nazism the effect, not cause of Germanic madness, 126; infiltration of her people, 128; and the "Leader Principle", 143; reparations, divergence on between Britain

and French, 148; admission of to the League of Nations, 155; Briand-Kellogg Pact, signing of, 159; secret rearmament of, 159, 168; B.'s first official visit to Berlin, 159; readiness of German minority to co-operate with the Czechs, 160; claim to equality granted, 161; leaving by, of the League of Nations, 163; introduction of conscription, 168; repudiation of the Versailles Treaty, 171; and breach of her treaty obligations, 178; and C., proposed non-aggression pact, 183; concentration of troops on C. frontiers, 195; the taking over of C. and the enormous thefts from, 246; treaty with Russia, 1939, 298; B. on the use of gas and a last air-attack on London, 336; on their admission of defeat, 336; and the trial of the war criminals, 336
 Goebbels, Dr, 200, 257; and B.'s letters on England, 50; his propaganda about Bolshevik sympathies of C., 169
 Goering, Hermann, 200, 244, 257; violent speech by, Sept. 10th, 1938, 202; his move against B., 314
 Gömbös, General, 167
 Goureaud, General, appreciation of, 112
 Grabski, Polish Premier, and Silesia, 144
 Grandi, Count, Italian Foreign Minister, and Magyar revisionism, 160; his visit to Hungary, 160
 Great Britain, the election of 1905, 43; entry of into the First World War and its effect, 51; and passport photographs, 56; relations with France in 1923, 148-149; no revision of Peace Treaties proposed, 157; dispute with Turkey, 174; Home Fleet manoeuvres, 202; moral collapse of, 1938; cause of, 204, 323; her unreadiness for war, 230; mobilization of the Fleet, 1938, 221, 227; support of France, 224; refusal of the Government to recognize the new position of C., 250
 Great Moravian Empire, the religious struggle in, 20
 Greece, the Duke of Connaught a proposed ruler of, 54; attitude of, to Lloyd George, 111; and the murder of General Tellini, 148, 162
 Greek-Yugoslav Agreement, 253
 Grosse Schütt, the, 123
 HABSBURG RULE, start of, 24; fate of Bohemia under, 26; expected downfall of, 66; and the Czech nation, 84; efforts to preserve, 106, 108; Armistice terms,

- signing of, 115; Allies' object in breaking up, 125; and B.'s pressing for exclusion of, from the Austrian throne, 142; possible restoration of, 142-144; and the Vatican, 287
- Habania aerodrome, B. at, 307
- Hácha, Dr. Emil, resignation of, 243; meeting with Hitler, 244; and the surrender of Bohemia and Moravia, 245; and B., 1938, 316; and a Bohemian Protectorate, 320
- Hainisch, Michael, Austrian President, and Burgenland, 141
- Halifax, Lord, and the Anschluss, 186, 191; meeting with Wiedemann, 197; and the reply of the Syrový Government, 222; and the reply of the C. Government, 223; his report to Parliament on C., 247
- Hardinge, Lord, 123
- Harmsworth, Hon. Esmond, visit of, to Hungary, 158
- Haushofer, Dr., 183, 184
- Havlíček, Karel, journalist, his support of Palacký's Liberalism, 30; account of, 30; B. and his policy, 156
- Heinold, Minister of the Interior, 55
- Henderson, Arthur, and the League of Nations, 150
- Henderson, Sir Neville, and German concentration against C., 195; and the certainty of war, 224
- Henlein, Konrad, Führer of the Sudeten, 185; gain of seats in C., 169; his eight points and other demands, 190-191; visit to London, 193; visit to Berchtesgaden, 193-194; action of, on return from, 196; and Runciman, 199; orders to his followers to resort to self-defence, and Runciman's remonstrance, 200; visit to Hitler, 200; B.'s suspicion of, 201
- Herriot, Edouard, and MacDonald, 149, 150; and Chamberlain, 152
- Hess, Rudolf, 200, 257; plot to destroy Austria, 186
- History of Bohemia* (Palacký), Seton Watson on, 27
- History of the Bohemian Language and Literature* (Dobrovský), 27
- History of the Popes* (Pastor), quoted, 23 & n. 2
- History of Socialism* (Beneš), Vol. I, publication of, 49-50
- Hitler, Adolf, 77, 125, 142, 168, 257; B. on, as an animal-like man, 14-15; his treatment of English statesmen, 15; and the Sudeten Germans, 16, 18; his intuition, 33; his belief in himself as an artist, 46-47; and B.'s activities, 64; and B.'s supposed promise to make C. another Switzerland, 126; a non-smoker; B.'s refusals to visit, 135; his accession to power, 143, 162; his National Socialists at the poll, 160; and Mussolini, and their relations, 166; his foreign policy, 172; British fear of, 1938, 175; Locarno Pact denounced by, 178; B.'s warning to on burgling C., 181; on rearmament of C., 182; negotiations with Russia, 184; and Bolshevism, 185; and Schuschnigg, 186; as the greatest German ever born, 186; and the concentration of troops on the C. frontier, 195-196; his intense hatred of B., 196; and Henlein, 200, 201; his demand for an "incident" before publication of Plan Four, 202; his speech, Sept. 12th, 1938, 203; his terms at Godesberg refused by Chamberlain, 217; his reply to Roosevelt's appeal, 222; his speech at the Sports Palace, 223-224; warned that Great Britain would support France, 224; invitation to Chamberlain to attend at Munich, 228; and the ignoring of his concessions at Munich, 236; his military occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, 244; taking over of Czech people and country, 245; Roosevelt's invitation to, to give assurance of his intentions, 251; his unwisely impudent reply, 251; and Lidice, 255; his recognition of B. as his worst enemy, 260, 265; his plan for Russia, 297-298, 302; and his coup in C., 320; Munich his first real victory, 322
- Hlaváč, *Cas* correspondent, B.'s discussion with, 61
- Hlinka, Father, and his Party, 243
- Hoare, Sir Samuel, later Lord Templewood, 88; and B., 89; and the Hoare-Laval deal, 171, 175; on the Government's attitude to the League, 172; and the Abyssinian dispute, 174; resignation from the Foreign Secretaryship, 175; and the taking over of C., 246
- Hodža, Dr. and the Magyars, 116, 117; and the proposed Nationalities Statute, 194; Hitler's interview with, 196; and C.'s inability to wage war alone against Germany, 214; resignation of his Government, 215; and the mobilization of the Forces, 218
- Hohenlohe-Langenburg, Prince Max Egon of, and Runciman, 199
- Hoover, Herbert C., 133
- Hull, Cordell, 304

- Hungary, Karolyi's efforts to save, 114 *et seq.*; entry into, of the ex-Emperor Charles, 140-141, 142; British guarantee against Habsburg restoration, 142; and the charge against B. of intolerance towards, 159; collaboration with Poland, 167; warning to, 220
- Hus, John, 271; as exponent of Wycliffe's new Realism, 22; account of, 22, 24, 38; B.'s ode to, 33; commemoration of his death, 156; a national hero, 287, 288
- IMPERIALI, MARCHESI, Italian Ambassador, and the British Declaration on C., 101
- In Defence of Dr Beneš and Czech Democracy* (Lennhoff), quoted, 185-186, 189-190, 194
- Inskip, Sir Thomas, Minister for the Coordination of Defence, 178
- International Commission, Berlin, Czechoslovak representatives at, 234
- Italy, and her place in counsels of Central Europe, 149; war material en route from to Hungary seized on Austrian frontier, 158; and the entry into Abyssinia, 173; defeat of, at Thessaly, 299-300; fall of Mussolini and unpreparedness of high commands to deal with, 306
- Iran, Russian denial of claims on, 313-314
- Ireland, 29, 49, 59
- JAKSCH, WENZEL, Social Democrat, and request to Runciman for visas, 238 & *n.* 1
- James, William, B. on, 266, 270
- James I, King of England, offer of to act as Mediator, 25
- Janin, General, Commander-in-Chief of the Czechoslovak army, and its transfer to the Western Front, 93
- Japan, recognition by, of the National Council, 102; representation of, at the Conseil des Cinq, 123; and Manchuria, 161-162; and the League of Nations, 163; and her proposed struggle with Russia, 1935, 165
- Joffre, Marshal, 72
- John, King of Bohemia, at Crécy, 21
- Journal des Délats*, Gauvain's articles in, 66-67, 80
- Jevtič, and the Little Entente, 162, 167
- KALININ, MIKHAIL, statement by, on Russian support for C., 193; a signatory to the 1943 Treaty, 308
- Kalla, Colonel, 316
- Kammerer, Albert, and B.'s Memorandum on the Czechs in Austria, 1916, 78-79; on action to be taken, 80
- Karolyi, Count, his effort to save Hungary, 114 *et seq.*, 125
- Kašpar, Cardinal, death of, 289; nomination of new Archbishop deferred, 289
- Kerillis, Henri de, on Bohemia and Slovakia, 187
- Kiev Association and Dürich, 72-73
- Kirov, assassination of, 166
- Koch, Dr W., retirement of, B. on, 169, 171
- Korneitchuk, Alexander, B.'s meeting with, 307; signatory to the 1943 Treaty, 308
- Kovanda, Heinold's valet, material for M. collected from, by B., 55, 60
- Kožlany, B.'s boyhood at, 34; and departure from, 38
- Kramář, Dr, first Prime Minister of C., 56; and the Russians in Prague, 57; his conviction of Russia's success, 61; passport refused to, 61; arrest of, 62; and the organization of the new army, 113-114; B. on, 122; Nicolson's dislike of, 123, 124, 181; and belief he was in the pockets of the French, 124; responsibility of, for hostile atmosphere towards B., 132; first delegate of C. at the Peace Conference, 132; account of, 132; his jealousy of B., 133; settlement of his dispute with B. by a Court of Honour, 160
- Krejčí, and B., 37
- Krofta, Dr Kamil, quoted, 24; C. note presented by, to Britain and France, 210; Newton's visit to, 225; his announcement of acceptance of Munich decisions, 234
- Krystinec, his introduction of B. to Madame M., 37
- Kundt, Wilhelm, Henleinist leader, 198; and B.'s Plan Three, 201; and Plan Four, 201
- Kurjer Warszawski*, London correspondent of, 293-294
- LACAZE, Minister of Marine, 72
- Lacroix, de, and C., 193; and its proposed dismemberment, 210, 211-212; the Munich decision, 235
- LaGuardia, Mayor Fiorello, and B.'s reception in New York, 242
- Lansing, Robert, American Secretary of State, on B., 19
- Laroche, and the claim for the Grosse Schutt, 123
- L'Assommoir* (Zola), B.'s translation of, 50
- Laval, Pierre, 172-173; and Mussolini, 167-168; and the Heare-Laval deal, 171-174;

- and the Abyssinian dispute, 174; his corrupting influence, 178; account of, 335-336
- League of Christian Princes for the preservation of peace in Europe, project of, 258
- League of Nations, 149; power of, not to be used at Genoa Conference, 145; prestige of, B.'s fight for, 161, 162; overriding of, 163; German withdrawal from, 163; and the violation of the Covenant, 173; B.'s work to strengthen, 259
- Léger, and the Munich Conference, 1938, 233
- Leipzig, founding of German University at, 23
- Lenin, N., and Soviet representation at the Genoa Conference, 147
- Leninism* (Stalin), quoted, 281
- Lenhoff, Eugene, quoted, 186 n., 189 & n., 194 n.
- Lennox-Boyd, A. T., on Britain and C., 187
- Leygues, M., Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French Chamber, 79
- Lidice, obliteration of, 255
- Lisický, Dr, and an interview with B., 316
- Little Entente, the, and Russia, 162; and Mussolini's schemes, 163; French solidarity with, 167; policy of, 179
- Litvinov, Maxim, and disarmament, 165; and joining of the League by Russia, 165; on Russia's aid to C., 202, 212; his resignation, 1939, 297
- Lloyd George, Earl, his misunderstanding of B., 82; and the destruction of Austria-Hungary, 95; French suspicions of, 106; and the C. Republic, 110-111; attitude to, of Greece, 111, 124; disagreement with Poincaré, 145; and the Conservatives, 145; and B. at Genoa Conference, 144 *et seq.*; and the British and Russian trade treaty, 150; and the Protocol, 152; his pro-German sympathy, 179
- Locarno, 152; signing of the treaties at, 153, 183-184
- Lockhart, Sir Robert Bruce, accredited British representative to the Provisional Czechoslovak Government, 324; and a declaration that the Munich Dictate was null and void, 324; and Churchill's repudiation of, 327-328; and the final liquidation of, 329
- London, B.'s lodgings in, 42, 43; defence operations commenced, Sept., 1938, 221
- Lothian, Lord, meeting of with Czernin's delegate, 334
- Louis, Paul, a foreign editor of *Petit Parisien*, 65
- Lumir*, B.'s lecture published in, 59
- Lvov, Prince, and a Provisional Government, 84
- Lwow, 291
- MACDONALD, J. RAMSAY, 171; and Herriot, 149; and the League of Nations, 150
- Mácha, K. H., poet, 266-267 & n.
- "Maffia", 58, 60; origin of, 57; meeting of, at Šamal's house, 62
- Magyars, the, 20; their entry into C., 116; and demarcation line established, 117; their race intolerance, 125
- Maisky, Ivan, and his disbelief in war, 298; and the signing of the Treaty with Russia, 302
- Making of a State, The* (M.), cited, 52 & n.
- Malkin, Sir William, Legal Adviser to the Foreign Office, 223
- Manchurian outrage, the, 162
- Margerie, de, B.'s interview with, 72
- Marx, Karl, B.'s attitude to, 49
- Masařík, Dr Hubert, report by, on the Munich Conference, 232-234
- Masaryk, Alice, daughter, imprisonment of, 74
- Masaryk, Jan, and the reply of the Srovy Government to the Godesberg Memorandum, 222; and to a proposed conference, 223; and the signing of the Treaty of Alliance between C. and Soviet Russia, 302; agreement with B. on co-operation, 316; and a declaration that the Munich Dictate was null and void, 324
- Masaryk, Madame Charlotte, B.'s introduction to, 37; her health and isolation, 74
- Masaryk, Olga, 60
- Masaryk, President Thomas Garrigue, 19, 50, 264; ancestry, birth, 30; marriage, 30; professorship at Prague University, 30; the legacy left him by a pupil and his use of, 30-31; his early interest in B. 37; as a dangerous political influence, 37; renewal of acquaintance with B., 46; B. a member of his Progressive Realist Party, 49; advice of, to the Prague Jews, 52; and the decision to work with B., 52, 54; and the cause of the First World War, 53; and the offer of C. to the Duke of Connaught, 54; the expansion of Russia, 54; Šmeral's attitude to, 54; visit to Italy, 55; in Switzerland, and B.'s journey there to warn him, 56; his intention to remain

- abroad, and entry into a struggle against Austria, 56; on the raising of money, 56, 58; visit to, by B., 59; anxiety of to declare Czech opposition to Austria-Hungary, 60; on Russia, 62; and B.'s escape, 63-64; London the perfect milieu for his qualities, 66; as Professor of Slavonic Studies, King's College, 67; received by Briand in Paris, 68; Dürich's intrigue against, 72; his arrival in Russia during the Revolution, 73; his genius in choosing B., 82, 265; advice to Czech Deputation, 84; and the establishment of a Czech army, 85; his will, B. to act as executor, 86; and the Declaration of the British Government on the C. National Council, 101; his visit to Tokio, 102; and the Washington Declaration, 102; his approval of scheme for constituting a government, 104; as Prime Minister of the new Government, 104; elected first President of the Republic, 114; advice to B. for his own lectures, 118; return to Prague, 120; gaffe by, 123; retirement from the Presidency, 136; death of, 136; B.'s funeral oration, 136-138; and B. and the League of Nations, 156; his eightieth birthday celebrations, 161; re-elected President, 166; his failure in health, 166; B.'s study of, 267; his study of English philosophers, 268
- Mastný, Dr, interview with Sir Horace Wilson, 232-233; and Goering's threat against B., 314
- Matin, Le*, B.'s article in, 80
- Maugham, Lord, K.C., 219, 226, 228, 229
- Mein Kampf* (Hitler), 181
- Metternich, Prince, fall of, 27
- Mikolajczyk, Stanislaw, 311
- Milyukov, P. N., Foreign Minister, 73, 84; B.'s meeting with, 74
- Molotov, V. M., and the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty, 305-306, 325
- Moravian Empire, the, and Christian Missionaries, 20
- Moravská Ostrava incident, meaning of, 202
- Mottistone, Lord, on Germany's attitude to Britain, 168
- Moysset, Professor, *chef du cabinet* of Leygues, 79
- Munich: Before and After* (Ripka), quoted, 196, 214
- Munich Conference, 1938, 230 *et seq.*; British declaration of the Dictate as null and void, 324; final liquidation of, 329 *et seq.*, 335
- Munich Putsch, Hitler's behaviour at, 16
- Mussolini, Benito, and the bombardment of Corfu, 148; in 1927, 156; his denunciation of the arbitration treaty between Italy and Yugoslavia, 160; on revisionism and the warlike face of Italy, 160; his trouble-making intentions, 162; intriguing of, with Germany, 163; and Dollfuss, 166; his moral cowardice, 166; and Hitler, 166; and France, 166; his policy, 167; and the entry into Abyssinia, 173; and the Berlin-Rome Axis, 183; Greek resistance to, 299; fall of, 306; B.'s visit to, 1923, 335
- My War Memoirs* (Beneš), cited, 40, 43 & *n. et seq. passim*
- Naše Doba*, review, B.'s work on, 37
- Nation Tchèque, La*, political paper, ed. Denis, 59, 61-62
- National Council of Labour, and the proposed dismemberment of C., 210
- National Socialist Party, B. a member of, 134
- Nationalities Statute, the, 193, 194, 197
- Nejedlý, Professor Zdeněk, 277 *n. 1*
- Němec, Dr, as B.'s opponent, 136
- Newton, Basil, British Minister to C., 193, 198; and its dismemberment, 210 *et seq.*, 235
- Nichols, P. B., C.M.G., Minister to the C. Government in London, 304; and the Munich Dictate, 324
- Nicolson, Harold, on B.'s beard, 107 & *n. 1*, 122; on Štefánik, 120; on B.'s requirements, 122, 124, 125; on B. and the Council of Ten, 122-123, and the Conseil des Cinq, 123; his dislike of Kramář, 123, 124, 181; and the lessons he learned at the Peace Conference, 124
- Ninčič, and the alliance with C., 140
- Non-Aggression Pact, 163
- Northumberland, Duke of, and the Protocol, 150
- ÖDENBURG (Sopron), 142
- Olič, Anna, B.'s objection to her father, 40-41; his home with, 51; help of, with decoding, etc., 57
- Oppressed Nations Congress, 95-96, 106
- Origin and Evolution of Modern Political Individualism*, The, B.'s Doctorate thesis, 46
- Osuský, Dr Štefan, Czechoslovak Minister in Paris, 252
- Oxford and Asquith, Herbert, first Earl of, 67; taking of the chair at lecture in London University, 101

- PALACKÝ, FRANTIŠEK, and his *History of Bohemia*, 27; leader of the Czechs, 27; invited to bring Bohemian representatives to the German Parliament, and terms of his refusal, 27-29; his scheme for a federal empire, 29-30
- Pan-Germans and Austria, 27
- Paris, B.'s departure for, life and studies in, 38; the perfect milieu for his qualities, 66; establishment of the Conseil National in, 69; Czech colony in, as trouble-makers, 91-93; and the British Declaration on C., 101; unveiling of a plaque on wall of the nursery of the C. Republic, 160
- Passports, difficulties with, 56 & n. 2, 61, 97
- Parmoor, Lord, and the Protocol, 150, 151
- Paul, Prince Regent of Yugoslavia, 179, 220
- Peace Conference, Nicolson's notes on, 124; the Czechoslovak delegates, 124, 125
- Peacemaking* (Nicolson), quoted, 107 & n., 120, 122
- Pichon, French Foreign Minister, 98, 122, 123; and the German peace feelers, 1916, 78; the signing of the Czechoslovak Army decree, 89, 94; and the British Declaration on C., 101
- Pilsudski, Marshal Józef, 167; approach of, to France, 164
- Pittsburg, and the presentation of colours to 21st Regiment of Czechoslovak Infantry, 96
- Pius XI and B., 288-289
- Poincaré, Raymond, and the signing of the Czechoslovak Army decree, 89; the presentation of colours to the 21st Regiment of Infantry, 94; further meeting with B., 96; disagreement with Lloyd George, 145; his dislike of Conferences, 148; and Curzon, 149
- Poland, and the Little Entente, 163; policy of, 164, 167; collaboration with Hungary, 167; worsening of relations with Germany, 179; and the dismemberment of C., 213, 220; B.'s solution for a final settlement of, 290, 294, 295; suggested federal union with C., 294; as definitely opposed to C., 294; necessity for alliance with Russia, 295; fear of the Sovietizing of, 296; solving of the territorial problem on the basis of the Curzon Line, 304; the problem of, discussion on, at the Bolshoi Teater, 311-312
- Poles, the, and the Habsburgs, 144
- Polish Army, the, French disparagement of, 91
- Politis, Nicolas, and the Protocol, 150
- Port Cros, B.'s stay at, 135
- Prague, ancient German university at, 21; account of, 22; withdrawal from, of German masters and students, 23; M.'s professorship at, 30; B. as a teacher in, 46, 49, 59; the politicians, and the National Council, 113; value of, to Hitler, 188; letters from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to B., 189-190; a British Adviser to be sent to, 197; as the key to Europe, 276
- Prague University, B.'s studies at, 37; Germanizing of, 38; B.'s Doctor's thesis offered to, 46; B. accepted as a *docent*, 50
- Právo Lidu*, B.'s articles in, 38, 39, 42, 49, 50; republishing of, as German propaganda, 42-43
- Přemyslide dynasty, the, 20, 21
- President Masaryk Tells His Story*, 55 & n. 1
- Price, G. Ward, his interview with Hitler, 16; and Hitler's claim that the Czechs had been an ancient German principality, 21
- Progressive Realist Party, B., a member of, 49; and the *Cás*, 51
- Progressive Youth Congress at Pilsen, B.'s visit to, and its result, 50
- QUAI D'ORSAY, 72, 79, 80, 87-88, 94
- Quirielle, journalist, 65
- RAEDER, ADMIRAL, on Germany's unreadiness for war, 227
- Rashdall, quoted, on Hus, 23
- Rašić, General, liaison officer, 76
- Rašín, Dr Alois, first Czechoslovak Minister of Finance, his character, 62; arrest of, sentence of death, reprieve and imprisonment, 62; later activities, 108
- Rennell, Lord, on Germany, 168
- Ribbentrop, Joachim von, 257; his denial of intention to invade C., 195; and the Berchtesgaden visit, 205; in Moscow, 298
- Ripka, Dr Hubert, 304, 329; on B.'s endeavours to preserve peace, 196 & n.; on B.'s condition after the Franco-British ultimatum, 214 & n., 215
- Rochat, and Masafík, 232, 234.
- Rome, the Inter-Allied Conference at, 1917, and the Czech movement, 80; conflicting interests at, and B.'s success, 81; B.'s first visit to, 83
- Roosevelt, President F. D., 304; his appeal to B. and Hitler, 221; and their replies, 222; his attitude to Germany on taking over of C., 250; Hitler's view of, 260

Rothermere, Lord, Iron Crown of St Stephen offered to, 111; and the Magyars, 114, 156; loss of popularity with, 158

Rovnost, B.'s contributions to, 39

Royal Air Force, mimic attack on London and the result, 159 & n. 1

Ruines (De Volnay), B.'s translation of, 46
Rumania, alliance with C. and Yugoslavia, 140; policy of, 179, 220; and the passage through of Russian troops, 220

Runciman, Lord, 99, 124, 128; sent to Prague as Adviser, 197-199, 200, 202; his remonstrance with Henlein, 200; as the liberator of Sudeten Germans, 202; return to London, 203, 205; his report, 206-207; of the Nazi terror in C., 217; and Jaksch, 238

Russia, expansion of, alarm at, in Western Europe, 54; M.'s appreciation of how little help could be expected from, 60; indifference of, to C.'s cause, 62; Dürich nominated representative in, 67; Whitehall's attitude to, 97; growing power of the Bolsheviks, 132; B.'s determination as to, 144; at the Genoa Conference, 147; and Japan, 1934, 165; renunciation of claims to Bessarabia, 165; a member of the League, 165; the purge in, 166; Pact of Mutual Assistance with France, 168; C. credit, 169; pledge of support to C. in an unprovoked attack, 193; and the dismemberment of C., 212; consultations with, to stop aggression, 247; refusal of the Soviet Government to recognize C.'s new status, 250; B.'s achievement of a treaty with, terms of, 253; development of, 276; religion tolerated in, 281; development of the people, 283; and Britain's policy, 1939, 297; agreement with Hitler, 297, 298; and transfer of Nazi Germans from C. approved, 303-304; B.'s forecast of action taken, 336

Ruthenes, the autonomy of the, 123, 147-148
Ruthenia, *see* Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia

ST MARTIN, Slovak demonstration at, 96
Šámal, Dr, contribution by, to the funds, 58; meeting of the "Maffia" at his house and the result, 62

Saxony, concentration of Nazi troops behind the frontier, 194

Schacht, Dr Hjalmar, proposed creation of a Central-European Union rejected by B., 160

Scheiner, Dr, Chairman of the Sokol

organization, 56 & n. 3; his arrest and removal, 62

Schuschnigg, Dr Kurt von, and the Three-Power Pact, 183; Hitler's abuse of, 186
Sebekowski and the Prague Government's Third Plan, 201

Second World War, cause of, 128-129; responsibility for, 164

Security and Arbitration Committee, B. elected President of, 158

Seton-Watson, Dr R. W., on Palacký's *History*, 27; and M.'s appointment to King's College, 67; his support of B. in his demands, 100

Sezimovo Ústí, B.'s house in Southern Bohemia, 315

Shaw, G. Bernard, B.'s translation of, 46

Siberian anabasis, the, 72

Sikorski, General Wladyslaw, and the entry of Russia into the war, 296-297, 299

Silesia, effect of German conquest of, 294

Simon, Sir John (now Viscount Simon), Foreign Minister, attitude of to Japan, 162; and the withdrawal of Germany from the League of Nations, 163; visit to Hitler, 168; a warning to Germany, 199

Sinclair, Sir Archibald, Bart., and the dismemberment of C., 228

Sixtus of Bourbon, Prince, 95

Skoda ammunition factory, 182

Skrzynski, Count, Polish Foreign Minister, and B., 152-153

Slovak National Alliance, 251

Slovak People's Party, its agitation for autonomy, 148

Slovakia, holding of, by Hungary, until the Treaty of Versailles, 20; union with the Czechs as the final settlement for, 290

Šmral, Dr, and a proposal B. should work for the Czech Social Democratic Party, 49; on Masaryk, 54

Smolk, Ludmila, 40

Smuts, Field Marshal the Right Hon. Jan Christiaan, C.H., K.C., 87, 95; and the claims for the Grosse Schütt, 123

Snowden, Viscount, on French financial policy, 161

Sokol Organization, origin of, 56 & n. 3; financial help for C., 58; warning given by, 62

Sonnino, Baron Sidney, Italian Foreign Minister, and B., 88

Spain, non-intervention in, 191

Spanish Civil War, start of, 181-182

- Šrámek, Mgr Jan, and C. frontiers, 255; his conversations in Latin, 281; and the support of the Czech Catholics, 287
- Šrobár, Dr, 115
- Stalin, Generalissimo Joseph, B.'s feeling for, 33-34; his support of the Czechoslovak Legion, 90; belief of in a Federation of Socialist States, 185; his trust in B., 254; Hitler's view of, 260; as definitely Marxian, 272³ and Prague University, 276; a signatory to the 1943 treaty, 308
- Stalingrad, German feeling on, 306
- Statute of the Little Entente, purpose of, 162
- Steed, H. Wickham, 97; his support of B. in his demands, 100, his suggested use of the word "trustee", 100
- Štefánik, General Milan, his romantic career, 67, 69, 75, 85-86; in 1919, 120-121; and Dürich, 71-72; and G.H.Q. Chantilly, 72; and the Czechoslovak Army, 89, 90, 93, 94; as Minister of War, 104; his return from Siberia for Peace Conference, 120; Nicolson on, 120; his crash to death near Bratislava, 121
- Stojadinović Government in Yugoslavia, pro-German bias of, 220
- Strang, William, and the Berchtesgaden visit, 206; visit to Russia, 297
- Stresa Conference, the, shattering of, 171
- Stresemann, Dr Gustav, 155; and a security pact with France, 151, 154; and the League of Nations, 155; as forerunner of Hitler, 160; B.'s warning to against an Anschluss of Austria, 160; advice of, to the Sudeten Germans, 260
- Strimpl, artist, later Czechoslovak Minister at Brussels, 65
- Štúr, Slovak scholar, his effort to save Slovak culture from Magyarization, 286
- Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, backward condition of, 123, 147-148, 177; declaration of independence, 243; incorporation of, in Hungary, 243; B. on, 290
- Succession States, the, 129, 157
- Sudeten Germans, the, 181; Hitler's concern for, 16, 18; the engineered crisis, 126; gain in seats for the Party, 169; the Nationalities Statute, 193, 194, 197; invented atrocities against, 194; their desire "to go home to the Reich", 203, 205; Hitler on their oppression and terrorism, 217; their reluctance to go home to the Reich, 219; their final settlement, 256-257; B.'s account of, and settlement plans for, 291-293
- Sudetenland, creation of, 109 & n.
- Švehla, Dr, Cabinet formed by, 1921, 133
- Švihovský, Czech journalist, 41
- Sychrava, Dr, editor, 59, 62; B. on, 60; lack of military experience, 86; telegram to B. to return to Paris, 106; appointed first Czechoslovak Minister in Paris, 106
- Synod of Pisa, activities of, 22
- Syrový, General, as dictator of C., 215, 218; his reply to the Godesberg Memorandum, 222; construction of his government, 236
- TARDIEU, ANDRÉ, his article on the Czechoslovak movement for *Le Temps*, 79, 80
- Teheran Conference, the, 1943, 303, 307
- Tellini, General, Mussolini and the murder of, 148
- Temps, Le*, Tardieu's articles in, 79, 80
- Teschén (Těšín), ceding of to Poland, 144, 153, 172; B. on, 290-291
- Thomas, Albert, and B., 65
- Times, The*, and the transfer of the Sudeten territory to Germany, 201
- Tiso, Father Josef, and the disintegration of C., 243; and the betrayal of the Republic, 320
- Titulescu, Nicolae, and the Statute of the Little Entente, 162, 165, 167; death of, 162; in charge of Foreign Affairs, 179; his resignation, 179; plan to assassinate, 332
- Tolstoi, Alexei, his financial position, 284
- Trautmannsdorf, Count, 183, 184
- Trianon Treaty, the, 156
- Trotsky, L., and world revolution, 185
- Truth about the Munich Crisis, The* (Maugham), 219 & n., 226, 228
- Truth about the Peace Treaties, The* (Lloyd George), 19 & n., 110, 124, 146
- Tukhachevsky, Marshal M. N., shooting of, 184-185
- Turkey, Japan's offer to, 165
- U.S.A., and the First World War, 77; the declaration of war on Germany, 84; and the declaration on C., 102; refusal of, to recognize the new situation in C., 250; Neutrality Act, revision of, 251; importance of an understanding with Russia, 303
- Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (Rashdall), quoted, 23
- Vatican, the, 182; B.'s establishment of friendly relations with, 287-289; recognition by, of Slovakia (1944), 289; nomination of new archbishop and bishops deferred, 289

- Venizelos, Eleutherios, Prime Minister of Greece, and the Duke of Connaught as ruler of Greece, 54; provisional Government set up by, at Salonica, 81; his place at the Supreme War Council meeting, 110; an appreciation of, 118-119; his self-denial and charity, 262
- Versailles Treaty, Germany's repudiation of, 171
- Vesnič, 110
- Vidalon, General, 87
- Vienna, centralizing tendency of, 26; Kramář's expected appeal from, 61
- Vinohrady Imperial and Royal Gymnasium, B. a scholar at, 34
- Vlček, Hanna, B.'s first meeting with, and later marriage, 40-41, 44; visit to Berlin, 44, *see also* Bencš, Madame Hanna
- Voroshilov, Marshal K. E., a signatory to the 1943 Treaty, 308
- Vyx, Lieutenant-Colonel, and the withdrawal of troops from Slovakia, 116-117
- WASHINGTON, publication at, of declaration on C., 102
- Welles, Sumner, and the refusal of the U.S.A. Government to accept the new position of C., 250; negotiations with Soviet Russia, 304
- Welsh, the, relationship of, to the English, 286 & *n.*
- Wenceslas, King of Bohemia, 22-23
- White Mountain battle (Bílá Hora), 54; Czech defeat in, importance of, 16, 20, 25, 26; break-up of Czech aristocracy after, 33; anniversary of, Nov. 8th, 1918, and proclamation of independence of C., 105, 112
- Wiedemann, Captain Fritz, and Halifax, 197
- William II, Kaiser, 102, 112, 257
- Wilson, Sir Horace, account of, 223; his mission to Hitler, 223, 224; and the Munich Conference, 232-233
- Wilson, President Woodrow, 13 *n.* 1; and the Peace proposals, 1916, 78; notified of increase in submarine warfare, 84; and the declaration on C., 102; and the Fourteen Points, 104, 106; on offer of federal autonomy to nations of the Austrian Empire, 106-107
- Windischgrätz, Prince, and the forging of French banknotes, 157
- Winterton, Lord, on Russia's attitude to the dismemberment of C., 212
- World Economic Conference, at Genoa, 144
- YOUNG CZECH PARTY, the, refusal by B. to join, 49
- Yugoslavia, 80-81; and a formal defensive alliance with C., 140; and the German reoccupation of the Rhineland, 179; demonstrations against pro-German bias of the Government, 220; revolution, 1941, 299
- ZALEWSKI, Foreign Minister, 164
- Zita, ex-Empress of Austria, 142
- Zürich, discussions at, on propaganda, 60